ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL 2009

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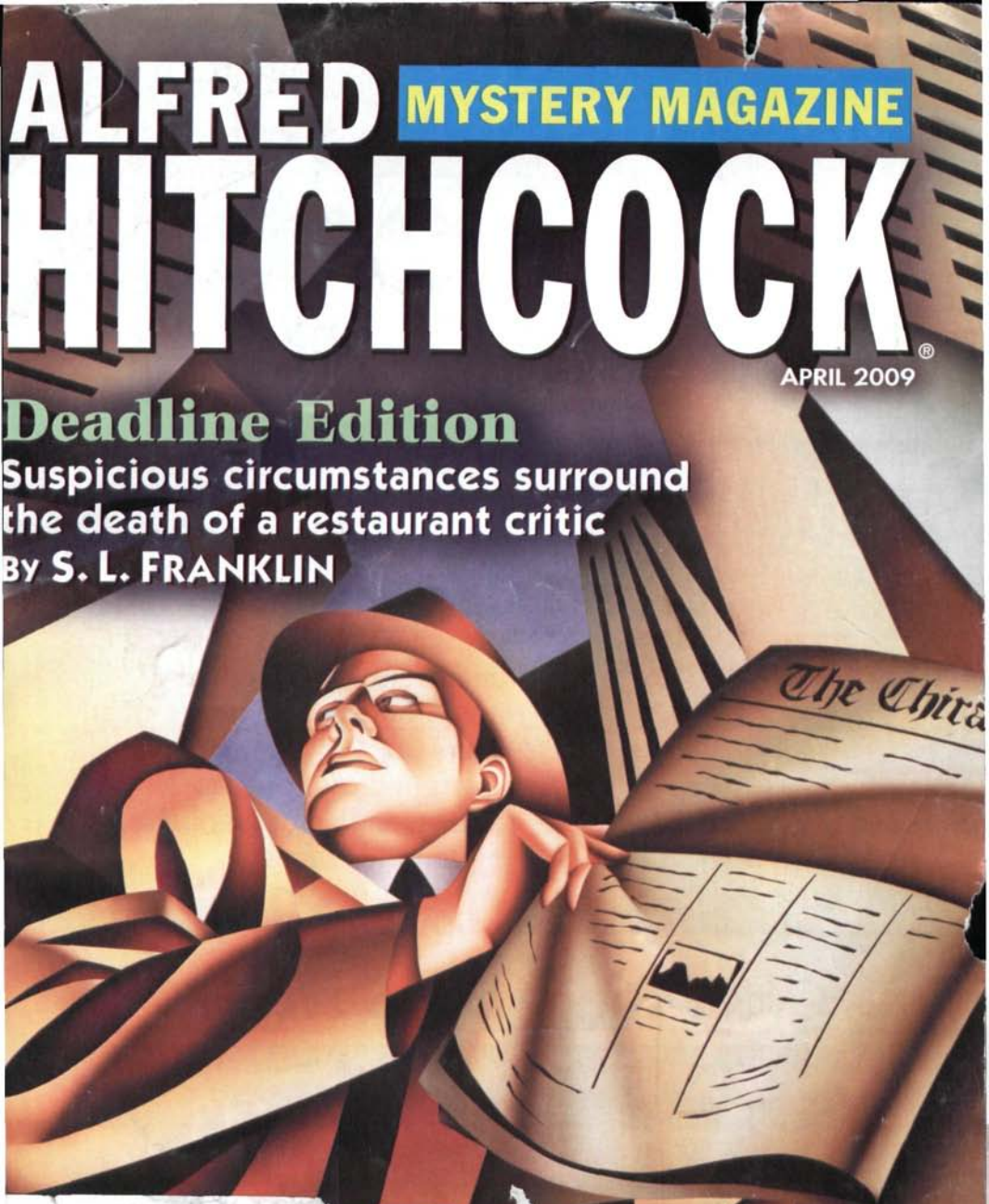
By S. L. FRANKLIN



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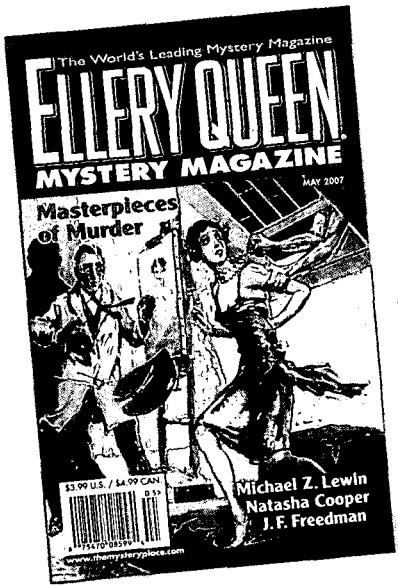

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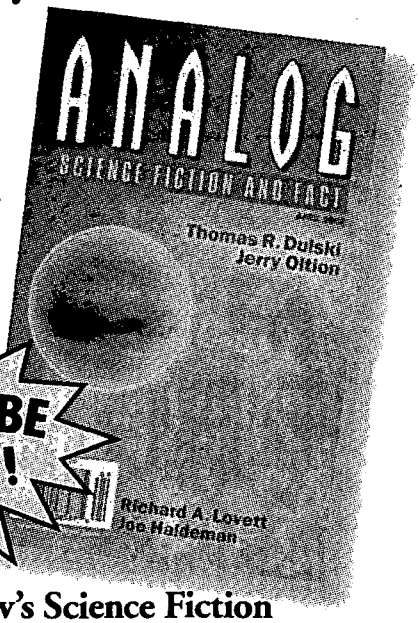

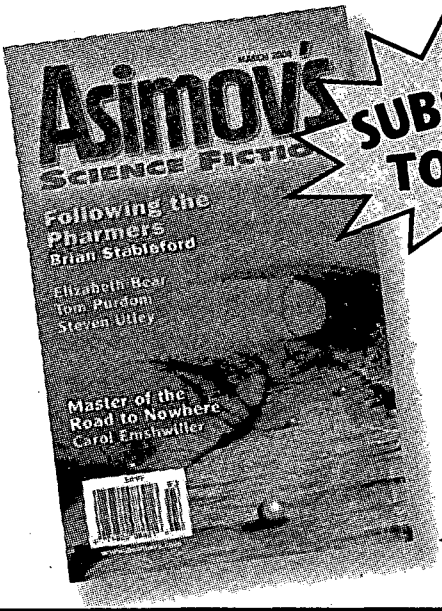

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE®

April 2009

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Second Chances

Two things are twice around this month.

We've been "reintroducing" older stories to our readers in our Mystery Classic feature for years; beginning with this issue, these will be be selected and introduced by contemporary AHMM authors. This month Loren D. Estleman found for us a dark tale of conjugal deception with Fletcher Flora's story "Insurance," and he explains why Mr. Flora deserves a second look.

We're pleased to announce the winner of our second annual Black Orchid Novella writing contest: Michael Nethercott of Guilford, Vermont, whose story "O'Nelligan's Glory" will be published in the July/August issue. The award is cosponsored by the Wolfe Pack, the Nero Wolfe fan club, and was given at their banquet in December. See the announcement about the third Black Orchid Novella contest on page 14.

If a subscription to AHMM wasn't in your stocking this year, well, you can have a second shot at that too! See our Directory of Services on page 111.

LINDA LANDRIGAN, EDITOR

The Lineup

A former New Orleans homicide detective and private investigator, O'NEIL DE NOUX is the author of the short story collection, *New Orleans Confidential.*

JOHN H. DIRCKX's last story, "Eliminate the Middleman," appeared in the January/February 2009 issue of AHMM.

LOREN D. ESTLEMAN is the author of nineteen mystery novels featuring Detroit P.I. Amos Walker.

S. L. FRANKLIN recently retired from the business world. His story "Mischief" appeared in July/August 2006 issue.

STEVEN GORE is a private investigator. "The Rules of Evidence" is his first published short story.

Booked & Printed columnist ROBERT C. HAHN reviews mysteries for *Publishers Weekly* and *New York Post.* He is the former mystery columnist for the *Cincinnati Post.*

BEVERLE GRAVES MYERS is the author of *The Iron Tongue of Midnight,* fourth in the Tito Amato series, published by Poisoned Pen in 2008.

KENT WESTMORELAND is a banker in New Orleans. "Price Tag Attached" is his AHMM debut.

FRANK T. WYDRA's story "Street Justice" appeared in October 2007. He is the author of *The Cure* (Dell, 1992).

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A CUTTING WIND

BEVERLE GRAVES MYERS

I pushed my tricorne firmly down on my head and bent into the fierce sirocco that had been scouring Venice for three days. The flood wind had come early that autumn of 1735. Waves slapped the stones of the quay beside the Grand Canal, while the few gondolas tethered at the mooring posts rocked and bounced in a frenzied dance. Augustus Rumbolt, the Englishman who was my closest friend and future brother-in-law, pointed his silver-knobbed cane.

"I don't like the look of those clouds, Tito." He indicated a towering gray mass that filled the sky to the southeast. "We'll have rain before nightfall."

I lifted my nose. During a sirocco the very smell of Venice changed. The dreaded wind began over the deserts of Africa, hot and dry as the blast of heat from a baker's oven, then gathered moisture as it picked up speed over the Mediterranean. By the time the sirocco had blown the length of the Adriatic, the air was heavy with scents of the south: sun-drenched sand, wild thyme, and lemon groves, all tainted with a whiff of mold and decay.

I nodded at Gussie. "All the better to hurry to the theater and put this errand behind us."

Our destination lay down a short *calle* and over a spacious square dominated by the columned façade of the Teatro San Marco. A poster pasted to a signboard carried my name and billing in bold letters—Tito Amato singing the lead role in a new opera by Maestro Vivaldi. I'd been rehearsing with the company for weeks, polishing my performance, pushing my voice to its limit. But I wouldn't be singing this afternoon. I'd been summoned to listen.

Maestro Casali, the director of the company, was pacing the length of the pink and gold foyer as Gussie and I entered. "You're late," he grumbled. "The boy's been in the back singing scales for twenty minutes, and Signor Morosini is getting restless."

"My apologies, Maestro. We were forced to walk. Most of the gondolas have sought shelter from the blow."

"Make your apologies to His Excellency. Morosini is on tenterhooks. He can't wait to hear the boy." Casali hurried us up a sweeping marble staircase as he continued, "Paolo Favretti is his name. He's from down the coast

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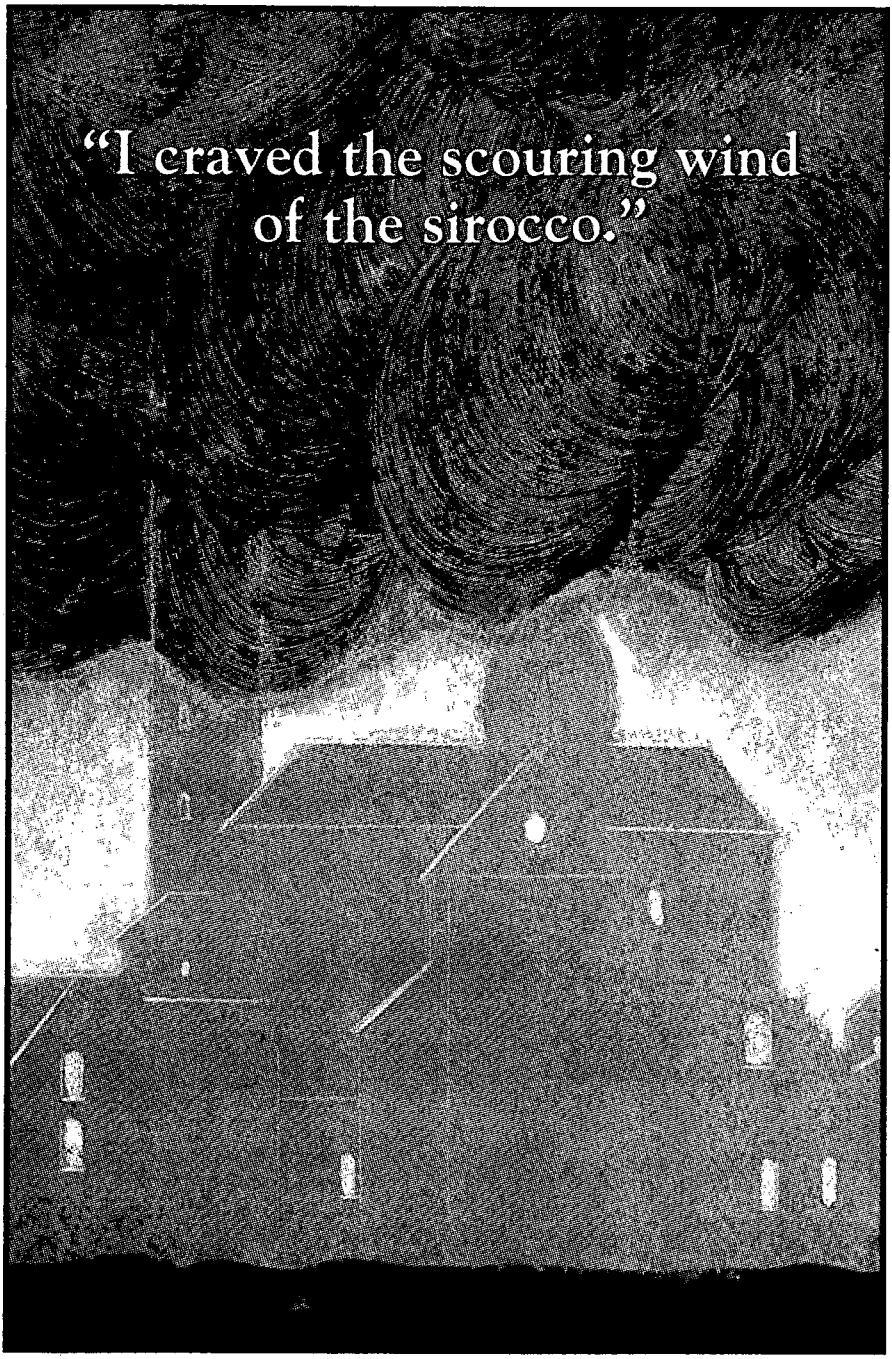

Edward Kinsella III

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. . . Ravenna. So far instructed only by his father, the choirmaster at the local cathedral."

"Have you heard him?" I asked.

The furrows in Maestro Casali's forehead flattened, and his eyes began to glow. "He's amazing, Tito. A pure, clear soprano with perfect intonation. The voice of an angel." He gave me a quick glance. "Much like you must have sounded as a boy, I imagine."

"How old is he?"

The director hesitated before answering, "His father says twelve."

I gave a low whistle. "Left it a bit late, haven't they?"

Casali shrugged. "The family has little money and no connections. That's why they've come to Venice. The father has taken Paolo's instruction as far as he can. They need to find a patron to fund the boy's future training and . . . " He cleared his throat. "And to pay for the necessary arrangements, of course."

I nodded and glanced at Gussie. He shook his head in disapproval. My friend was a great music lover, but as much as he admired my stupendous voice, he abhorred the sacrifice that had made it possible.

Casali conducted us to the patron's box that overlooked the stage, where we found Morosini and several oversize bravos wearing the livery of his household. So Morosini could have his pick of the operas performed on any given evening, he kept a box at every theater in town. I'd often observed him from the stage and thought he cut a handsome figure: tall, fortyish, always impeccably dressed and wigged. In the close confines of the box, the nobleman appeared less attractive. His mouth was chiseled in a petulant droop and his dark eyes flashed with a hard, cruel glitter.

After Casali had presented us and withdrawn, I felt Morosini's gaze linger on my form as I made the low bow that his station demanded. Gussie was treated to a similar inspection as he stammered through the usual pleasantries in his English-accented Italian. Indeed, Morosini tore his eyes from my friend's ruddy cheeks only to admire the muscular calves straining Gussie's white silk stockings.

This uncomfortable tableau was interrupted by the appearance of Maestro Casali down on the stage. As he clapped his hands for attention, we took our seats at the box railing. The vast auditorium was shrouded in gloom and shadow. The ceiling chandelier was dark, and only a few footlights at the lip of the stage were aflame.

Casali introduced Paolo and his father. The man had the look of a severe schoolmaster: pursed lips, spindly shanks, and a ramrod stiff back. He unbent to aim a deferential smile toward our box, then scurried to the harpsichord in the orchestra pit to arrange his music. After a pointed look toward his son, he sounded a flourish on the keyboard.

The boy dragged his heels toward center stage.

Paolo was a tall, gangly youth dressed in corded breeches and an old silk jacket whose sleeves stopped several inches short of his wrists. In a

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misguided attempt at elegance, someone had crowned him with a powdered wig done in lank sausage curls that hung to his shoulders like the ears of an untidy mongrel dog. His liquid brown eyes surveyed the dark theater with a mixture of awe and defiance. I would wager my right vocal chord that he was nearer fourteen than twelve.

I sighed, silently cursing the noble dandy who had demanded my presence at this impromptu concert. Then Paolo began to sing, and I was all ears.

He had chosen an aria from *Ataserse* by the Saxon composer Hasse. I'd snuck into a rival theater to hear the great Farinelli sing that opera during last year's Carnevale. Of course, young Paolo couldn't match Farinelli's dazzling vocal feats, but I confess that the boy moved me. His high notes soared on crystalline wings. His low notes were as mellow and sweet as fruit ripe and ready to drop from the branch. Most amazing to me, considering his approaching manhood, was that his throat delivered it all with an easy grace unmarred by any sign of catch or strain.

Paolo's eyes were as expressive as his voice, and unfortunately, they told me much. The boy didn't want to sing. His natural gifts had been polished to a high shine, but brilliance was no substitute for joy. I knew what it was to sing with joy. I did it almost every night. Sharing the beauty of music with a receptive audience was my life's crowning glory. Paolo's eyes were filled with dread.

As the last golden note shimmered in the air, Signor Morosini turned toward me with a wolfish smile. "What do you think, Signor Amato? Is he not brilliant?"

I nodded slowly, playing for time.

"Well, what say you? Will the boy make a great singer or not?"

"He does show talent, Excellency," I replied. "Great potential. But . . . I don't sense the *temperament* for the years of constant study required to make a virtuoso."

The nobleman snorted, then grinned at his liveried thugs. "A purse of gold ducats will do wonders for his *temperament*, as you call it. I'm interested in your professional opinion regarding the future of his throat. I don't fancy investing in a singer whose voice will break a few months down the road. Just tell me this. If we take his stones, will his soprano survive the surgery? Or is he already too old?"

I traded uneasy glances with Gussie. Take his stones, the man said! Spoken with no more emotion than a casual command to one of his footmen. My face grew hot. Morosini had no idea of what he spoke.

I was barely ten when I'd faced the knife. With a powerful elixir clouding my brain, the surgery itself, though not the pain afterward, was only a handful of scattered memories: an apothecary shop with an enormous aloe plant in the window, a shelf of blue and white jars labeled with exotic-sounding names and a table with sharp, shiny blades laid out in a neat row. The surgeon's face had remained a blank for many years, a mysterious

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cipher floating tantalizingly out of reach. It had finally returned in one of my more terrifying nightmares. Now I would never forget the man's thin-lipped smile or the wart the size of a chickpea at the tip of his nose.

Gussie had once asked what I would do if I came face to face with the surgeon on the piazza or in a cafe. What could I do? Thousands of boys were castrated for the singing schools every year, mostly in Italy. While the rest of Europe demanded our glorious voices for cathedral choirs and the opera stage, the northern countries rarely put their own to the knife. So there it was. One swipe of the blade and no going back. Mine was not a life I would have chosen, but I had made peace with it. Or so I thought.

The nobleman in front of me was fuming. I couldn't put Morosini off any longer.

"The boy's future?" I murmured. "Surely that is in the hands of God, Excellency."

The arrival of Maestro Casali and Paolo's father saved me from having to elaborate. The opera director was smiling broadly, and the father wore the calculating look of a man expecting to seal the bargain of a lifetime. He was actually rubbing his hands like a miser gloating over a stash of gold coins. Before their negotiations began in earnest, Gussie and I took the opportunity to bow ourselves out.

We started down the corridor that bounded the second tier of the curved auditorium. Narrow doorways led into the boxes on our right, and a row of windows pierced the outside wall to our left. While we had been engaged within, the storm had hit Venice with full force. The window panes streamed with sheets of silver rain and gusts of wind whistled through chinks in the masonry.

"It's a bad business, Tito," Gussie remarked.

"Yes, this is the worst sirocco we've had in years. I wouldn't be surprised if it pushes the tide over the Molo, right up to the porch of the basilica."

"No, I'm talking about Paolo. This gelding of boys. It's a despicable practice."

I replied heavily, over the drumming of the rain, "It's the way of things, Gussie. It's been going on for years. Can you imagine opera without its castrato heroes? Who would counter the female sopranos?"

"I don't know. The tenors?"

"Oh, Gussie. There's a reason why I and my kind are the undisputed kings of the stage. We have twice the range and twice the flexibility of the tenors, to say nothing of our exceptional tone. Who would pay to hear an opera featuring a tenor? Besides," I continued with a touch of asperity, "don't you enjoy hearing me sing?"

"You know I do," he replied with an irritated shrug, "but how many boys are mutilated to produce one voice like yours? For every virtuoso singer there must be dozens who never achieve fame or fortune. What happens to them?"

I thought back to some of my unhappy friends from the *conservatorio*,

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the ones who lacked the talent or heart for the stage or, worse yet, the ones whose voices had lowered and coarsened despite the surgeon's manipulations. "There's always other work," I replied uneasily. "Teaching, composing, copying musical scores."

"Then what about the ones who don't even make it off the table? The boys who die from loss of blood or, later, from fever. What could possibly justify their deaths?"

I could have mentioned the fascinating beauty of the voice, the unrivaled ecstasy to the ear, the almost sacred dedication to the music, but in truth, I was no more happy with the current state of opera than my English friend. "You're right, Gussie, absolutely right as usual. Perhaps someday the pendulum of public taste will swing back to a simpler, more natural style of singing. Then talented boys like Paolo will have nothing to fear. But until that day, what can one man do?"

"Perhaps the right man—oof—" Gussie broke off as Paolo charged out of the nearest staircase and careened into him.

The boy clutched his bedraggled wig in one fist, and his face was set in a pugnacious scowl that made him look more like a street urchin than a future theatrical sensation. His expression brightened when he recognized me. "Signore, you must help me."

"What is it, Paolo?" I asked, certain that I already knew.

"Please, I beg you, Signore. You are the great singer my father spoke of. You must tell them I'm no good."

I bit my lip. "But you are good. More than good. For your age, your voice is one of the finest I've ever heard."

He dropped his gaze and stared at the floor tiles.

"You might enjoy the *conservatorio*," I continued. "I learned a lot there and made many friends." Even to my own ears, I sounded hopelessly patronizing.

"I don't want to sing," he muttered between clenched jaws. "I don't care what Papa says."

"What does your papa say?" asked Gussie.

Paolo looked up at my friend's kind face. The words tumbled out. "I have eight brothers and sisters and I'm the only one who can sing. Papa says I have to let them cut my balls off so I can make some money for us. That's not even the worst of it." He snuffled miserably, tears wetting his cheeks. "That man with the money won't send me to school. He wants me to live with him in his palazzo and take training with a private tutor. I don't like him. He gives me funny looks." Paolo tugged on my sleeve. "Tell them my voice will go bad, Signore. Please. Tell them, and I can go find my cousin."

"What does your cousin have to do with this?" I asked.

"My cousin Flavio is second mate on a merchant ship. He's in port now, waiting for fair weather. He's promised that the captain will take me on as cabin boy if someone can convince Papa that I'll never be a singer."

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The boy's eyes pleaded. I thought furiously, but to no avail. Anyone with ears knew that Paolo had a wonderful gift, and the law gave his father the right to make any arrangement he chose.

"Paolo! There you are, boy." His father's voice floated down the corridor.

The unhappy youth took one look at the bravos following Morosini and Maestro Casali and fled the opposite way. The thugs brought him down before he had covered ten strides.

Morosini's men carried Paolo away, screaming and thrashing. His father dithered along in their wake. Looking extremely pleased with himself, Maestro Casali disposed of the boy's discarded wig with a well-placed kick toward a rubbish bin. I wondered what the director's cut of Morosini's largesse amounted to. If the reverential manner he used to hold Morosini's fur-trimmed cloak was any indication, Casali had been given a generous purse for finding the boy.

The blood drummed in my ears. Knowing myself for a fool, I opened my mouth to protest as the nobleman swept by on his way out.

Casali grabbed my arm. "Let it be, Tito," he whispered. "The contract is made, legal and binding."

"But, Maestro—"

"It's all been arranged. I knew Morosini would be fascinated by the boy. Even as we speak, the surgeon is waiting."

To my shame, my tongue remained limp in my mouth.

I refused to let myself think about the fate that awaited young Paolo. What I craved was air, the scouring wind of the sirocco to scrub me free of the treachery and greed that enveloped me like a miasma. I hurried from the theater with Gussie at my heels.

Out on the square, the rain had slacked off. The ferocious wind had not. Several men scuttled over the wet paving stones, their black cloaks billowing out like ravens' wings. Otherwise, all was deserted.

Without discussion, Gussie and I plodded north toward the Cannaregio, the domestic quarter where my home was located. Our route wound through a warren of *calli* and small squares divided by threads of water. The tide was coming in. Waves off the lagoon swept up those narrow canals, swelling the dark, angry water even with the lip of the walkway. We hastened along in single file, hugging the sides of the shuttered shops, until a gust of wind howled down the tunnel of high, packed buildings and drove a wall of water over the flat pavement.

I fell to my knees. The rushing water pulled at me like a many-armed demon intent on dragging my soul down to a frigid hell. Coughing and sputtering, I managed to brace myself against the support of the stairs to a wooden bridge. When the surge subsided, I scuttled, crabwise, to the nearest opening between the buildings. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Gussie do the same, farther down the pavement.

Rhythmic billows surged again and again, then receded in clutching fingers of pea green foam. They drove me down twisting alleyways and

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covered passages and forced me into strange squares where I called Gussie's name. Receiving no reply, I ran on, my only thought to keep moving and outrun the *acqua alta*.

When I finally stopped at the entrance to a narrow *calle*, my heart was pounding and a stitch burned in my side. The corner of the building where a street sign should have hung was blank, but the nameless alley seemed somehow familiar. I shivered. I was thoroughly wet, and my sodden cloak dragged at my shoulders like a fifty-pound weight. I had to find shelter quickly or I'd end up fighting pneumonia instead of performing Maestro Vivaldi's new opera.

I entered the dim passage. Within its shelter, the sirocco's blast eased to a distant roar and my footsteps sounded in loud, hollow clops. The buildings rose to three stories with shops on ground level and living quarters above. I banged at shuttered doorways, intent on rousing someone who could give me shelter from the flood. No one answered, but as the passage bent to the left, I saw a light shining through the gathering mist.

I ran to a door that stood wide open on a small shop. Light beamed from an oil lamp that sat on a counter on the opposite wall, but no shopkeeper was in evidence, only bulbous china jars that glinted in the flickering flame.

"Hello," I called. "Is anyone there?"

No answer.

Chilled to the bone, I threw ceremony aside and stepped over the threshold. The jars on the counter were labeled with exotic ingredients. Wormwood, opium, mercury, and . . . leeches. My mouth went suddenly dry. This was an apothecary shop, a disturbingly familiar apothecary shop.

I whirled around and found what I sought almost immediately: an aloe plant the size of a bushel basket, growing from a creamware pot set before the window. A tightening began deep in my stomach, rippling outward, tensing every muscle in my body. Surely not, I thought. This wasn't the scene of my nightmares. Nearly every apothecary in Venice must have such a plant.

A rustling came from behind a curtain drawn across an archway in the shop's dark depths. "Who is there?" I called out, the nerves in my scalp tingling.

Silence.

I moved slowly around the counter. Barely breathing, listening intently, I clutched the coarse curtain fabric. Nothing stirred on the other side. On a burst of courage, I jerked the curtain aside.

For one terrible moment, I was ten years old again. Strapped to the table with my hands tied to a post above my head. Trying with all my will to fight the drug that had been forced down my throat, to scream for my father to stop the man with the shiny blade. But this wasn't a dream. I was there, at the place where my life had changed forever. And this time my hands were free.

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With a wordless bellow, I grabbed an iron poker from a hook by the stove. I wielded that poker like a battle-ax. Slashing, beating, striking, smashing. Nothing was safe from my all-consuming rage. Glass shattered, thick tallow candles went flying, and books rained down from high shelves. I had no plan, no fixed idea of what I meant to do; my mind seemed to have split off from my body. Destruction was all I knew.

The table with the hideous leather straps was the last thing to go. I kicked it over and pounded it to splinters, stopping only when someone grabbed me from behind and shook me until my leaden arms dropped my weapon.

"Gussie!" I cried. "Where did you come from?"

My friend's yellow hair had escaped its ribbon and hung in wet strands around his worried face. "I've been searching for you everywhere. Up one alley and down another. Finally, I heard your screams. What's going on here?"

I swayed on my feet, fatigue suddenly washing over me. "Retribution," I whispered. "That's what's going on."

Gussie reached for the one candle that my explosive tantrum had miraculously spared. Shining the weak light into the dark corners, he picked his way around the periphery of the glass-littered room. When he reached an overturned bookshelf, he stopped and sent me a startled look.

"Tito, help me." He bent to lift the shelf off a pair of legs entwined in a bloody apron. The top half of the body was buried in books and papers. Once we'd cleared these away, I was staring into a face I knew as well as my own. It was the surgeon from my nightmare, right down to the wart at the end of his very dead nose.

I began to tremble. What had I done? "But Gussie, I didn't see him. I don't remember hitting him with the poker."

Gussie grabbed my arm. "Tito, pull yourself together. Look, he wasn't beaten to death." He held the candle to the man's chest. The hilt of one of his own surgical instruments protruded from the front of the bloody apron.

"I didn't do that." My head shook uncontrollably.

"Then who did?" my friend asked gravely.

We heard the tinkle of broken glass and the scrape of metal on stone. A tiny voice spoke up from across the room. "I did it. I stabbed him."

Paolo emerged from behind the stove, stripped to his shirt, pipestem legs bare and white.

"I had to stop him," the boy cried. "I couldn't let him cut me. One of the big men was trying to strap me down. I bit his thumb and . . . somehow I got off the table. I don't remember how. That was before I grabbed the knife . . ." Paolo's words trailed off and his eyes reflected Gussie's candle flame like a pair of miniature black mirrors.

I crossed the floor and took his hands in mine. They were as cold as ice. "Where's your father?" I asked.

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He shook his head dazedly.

"Think, boy." I squeezed his hands until he winced. "We have to move quickly."

"Papa said good-bye before they put me on the table. He said he couldn't bear to watch. The other men ran off when they saw I had a knife." Paolo took a huge gulp and asked in a shaky voice, "Are you going to get the constables?"

I looked at Gussie. "No!" we both cried at the same time.

Arranging Paolo's escape was the work of minutes. Gussie dragged the bookshelf back onto the surgeon's body, while I helped Paolo into his breeches and found him a dry cloak. As we bundled him through the outer room of the shop, my eye lit on the cash box behind the counter. I retrieved the poker, smashed the box, and stuffed a wad of paper notes in Paolo's jacket pocket.

"Now it looks like the man was killed in a robbery," I whispered to Gussie over Paolo's curly head.

We sped away from the shop unobserved, but Gussie refused to let me go with him and Paolo to locate Cousin Flavio's ship. Ever mindful of my fragile throat, the Englishman wound his own muffler around my neck and sent me home posthaste.

My story is not yet done. When Gussie returned from delivering Paolo to the wharf, my friend had a surprise for me. He found me in the kitchen, basking in the warmth of the fire. My sister Annetta had wrapped me in blankets and was pouring steaming water into a basin for my feet.

"Well, Tito," Gussie began, as he rubbed his damp hair with a towel. "It's time I answered your question."

"What question?"

"Before Paolo crashed into me at the theater, you asked me what one man could do to stop healthy boys being turned into capons."

I nodded slowly. Already that conversation seemed like it had happened days ago.

"Here's your answer." He dug in his waistcoat pocket and threw some pamphlets in my lap. "I collected these earlier today."

I scanned the booklets that could be had two for a penny at any bookstall in Venice. My clever countrymen rarely muzzled themselves in speech or in print. Pamphlets existed on every subject from the trivial to the sublime, and a particularly popular treatise might be debated in the cafés and coffeehouses for weeks.

I scratched my head. "You're going to write a pamphlet?"

"Hardly! No one would pay any attention to the criticism of an Englishman, not where Italian opera is concerned."

"Well, then. Why show me these?" Puzzled, I continued to leaf through the cheap, thin papers.

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Gussie didn't reply.

I looked up to find him regarding me solemnly. Light dawned. My mouth dropped open. "You want me to write one? But Gussie, I'm not a writer. I'm a singer."

"Who better to turn the tide of public opinion? As Venice's most celebrated *castrato*, people will be fascinated to read whatever you have to say on the matter. I can help you, if you'll let me."

Thinking furiously, I hugged the warm blankets close. A *castrato* singer speaking against the practice in the public press? It had never been done. A pamphlet like that would cause a sensation. As our house creaked under the sirocco's wild blows, I pictured the scene in the back room at the apothecary's, then Paolo cowering in the hold of a wildly rocking ship.

I smiled at Gussie. "Bring me paper," I whispered. "And a quill." I was already composing the pamphlet's opening lines in my head.

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THE RULES OF EVIDENCE

STEVEN GORE

"Maybe I better talk to my lawyer," Irish McCain said to Detective Spike Pacheco across the gray metal table.

The interrogation room was a dull canvas, uninterrupted by anything suggesting that a world existed beyond the paint and the locked door. No two-way mirror, no third chair, no muffled chatter of homicide detectives in the squad room down the hall.

"The Public Defender doesn't make house calls."

"Screw you."

Irish smirked at Pacheco's chubby brown face, then folded his arms across his chest. Withered, thirty-year-old tattoos of snakes and daggers hung on skin repeatedly stretched by pumping iron in the joint, then loosened by meth on the street. Pacheco could make out the word "Hell's" tattooed in faded prison-blue ink on the back of Irish's left hand.

"Anyway," Pacheco said, "you don't need a lawyer. You're not a suspect."

"Then why'd you haul me down here?"

"Because you're a witness."

Irish snorted. He'd watched a thousand crimes, from dope deals to murders, but never witnessed anything.

"To what?"

"Eddie Mucker's killing."

Irish formed his lips into a smile calculated to mold fiction into fact. "I wasn't even in San Francisco. I was in Sacramento." But his eyes didn't cooperate with his mouth. They remained uncommitted, as if unsure whether he needed an alibi for when the homicide actually happened or for when the police thought it happened. He ran for safety in the wrong direction. "All day."

Pacheco opened a manila folder, then slid over Irish's cell phone records covering the previous Wednesday. Six entries surrounding the time of the murder were highlighted in fluorescent yellow.

"Those calls originated from cell sites in San Francisco," Pacheco said.

Irish slid them back with his tattooed "Angels" hand. He'd been through this before and learned that an alibi had nothing to do with where he really

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was and all to do with where the police couldn't prove he wasn't.

"My wife had the phone," Irish said, cocking his head and grinning. "California's a community property state."

Pacheco answered with a gift-horse smile. "Here I am trying to treat you as a witness and you turn yourself into a suspect."

"Suspect?" Irish's grin died. "What'd I do?"

"One forty-eight point nine of the California Penal Code. Lying to a police officer."

Pacheco pulled out a Miranda advisement form, wrote Mucker's homicide case number at the top, turned it around, then slid it across the table along with a department-issued Bic pen.

Irish inspected the form. "Looks a lot different than the old ones."

"New chief. New forms."

"Same old bullshit." Irish slid it back, unsigned.

"You want to get to booking so you can bail out of this place?"

"Booking?" Irish's head snapped up. "What booking?"

"On the 148.9."

"That's chicken shit."

"Probably." Pacheco pointed at the cell phone records. "You want to try a different story?"

Irish spread his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "So what if I was in San Francisco? That doesn't mean I was there when Mucker bought it."

Pacheco withdrew a photocopy of a Burger King receipt he'd found in the garage where Mucker's body was discovered. It was time-stamped 2:13 P.M. on the day of the homicide, a half hour before neighbors cringed at the gunfire that killed Mucker.

Irish glanced at it, then pushed it back. "Doesn't mean anything. A lot of people like Double Whoppers with extra cheese."

Pacheco volleyed it back. "Look again."

Irish's eyes barely widened as he read the date and time. "Still doesn't mean anything."

Pacheco pulled out another copy, this one showing a fingerprint darkened by graphite powder. "Want to guess which of your greasy fingers made that?"

Irish didn't answer.

Pacheco retrieved the two receipts, but left them visible on the table. "You need to decide which you want to be," Pacheco said. "Witness or suspect."

Irish glanced at the door. "I'll be a suspect if it gets me out of here sooner."

Pacheco pointed at the Miranda form. "It's up to you."

Irish made a check mark in the I'm-not-answering-any-questions box, signed at the bottom, and then rose.

"Sit down."

Irish locked his hands on his hips. His face flared. "You said—"

"No, you said you'd get out of here sooner if you were a suspect, not me."

"You can't ask me anything." Irish jabbed a finger at the form. "I invoked my rights."

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"You learn that in prison?"

"Even my grandson knows what invoking your rights means."

"Is he like a junior Hell's Angel selling sugar cubes to hyperactive kids at recess?"

Irish smiled. "Nice try. But I'm not getting into it with you. It's over. You wiseguyed yourself into having to book me or let me go. I'm not saying nothing and you can't ask me nothing."

"You're only a third right," Pacheco said. "I can't ask you any questions, but I can say anything I want. So can you."

Irish's smile faded. His eyes swept the interrogation room, the bare gray walls, the folding metal chairs. "How many times you haul me in here in the last twenty years? Eight? Nine? Ten?" He looked down at Pacheco. "You ever get anything out of me?" Irish walked over to the door. His hand slipped around the unmoving knob. He turned back toward Pacheco, glaring. "Open this thing. I got stuff to do."

"I'm not asking you to snitch on anybody," Pacheco said. "I already know who killed Mucker."

"What do you mean you already know?"

"Billy Willis did it." Pacheco inspected his thumbnail, then pretended to scrape a bit of gunk from the underside. "You know how I know that?"

"I—"

Pacheco held up his palm. "Don't answer, you're a suspect now. That was just a rhetorical question. You know what that means, right? Rhetorical?"

"I know what rhetorical means, asshole. I went to the JC."

Pacheco held up his forefinger, then waved it side to side it as if he was a teacher silencing a student speaking out of turn. "That was also a rhetorical question."

Irish looked skyward, rolling his eyes, then leaned back against the door as if he now controlled it.

Pacheco pointed at a manila file folder on the table. "I interviewed Billy and his brother. They said the same thing."

"Which was?"

"They went over to Mucker's garage to pick up a generator for Billy's Harley. Mucker went off on Billy because he didn't bring the money and because Billy still owed him for the one he bought the week before."

"What kind of retard needs two generators for one bike?"

"Good question. You should've been a detective."

Since Irish wasn't, Pacheco couldn't tell him that a federal wiretap targeting Hell's Angels had intercepted meth dealers using motorcycle parts as code words. Generators were pounds of powder. Crankshafts were eight balls of crystal. Agents listening in the wire room figured it out when they heard Billy asking Mucker about buying half a generator.

Pacheco continued. "I think Billy and his brother went to rip off Mucker and they brought you along—"

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"You should write for TV."

"Because you and Mucker go way back—"

"Or maybe you been watching way too much."

"The only thing puzzling me is why a guy Mucker's age would go up against a punk Billy's age, unless, of course, he had something like a hand grenade."

Irish clenched his teeth. Grenades were a sore subject. The last time Irish told Pacheco to go screw himself, he and Mucker ended up doing six years in the federal pen on an explosives beef. Irish in Supermax in Colorado. Mucker in Sheridan, Wyoming. They'd only been out two months.

"Go screw yourself."

"I wouldn't go down that road again, if I were you."

"You ain't me. And you can't touch me on this thing. No D.A. is gonna build a case on a greasy Burger King receipt."

Pacheco knew that, too, but that wasn't his point, so he pushed on.

"What I haven't quite figured out is what you were doing with those punks," Pacheco said. "The way I hear it, they spent five years hanging around the Oakland chapter but never made the cut. Something about missing drugs or cutting a deal with the Aryan Brotherhood. Or maybe it was because they didn't step up in that Hot August Nights shootout in Reno. Or maybe it was rumors about them being informants."

Irish shrugged. "I wouldn't know anything about all that."

"That's what I figure. And I also figure you don't know something that's even more peculiar than Billy claiming he needed two generators." Pacheco surrounded the last two words with air quotes. "Much more peculiar." Pacheco raised his eyebrows. "You want to know what it is?"

"I don't give a—"

Pacheco stopped Irish again with a wagging forefinger. "That was another rhetorical question." Pacheco grinned. "Remember, you're the guy that wanted to be a suspect."

Irish rolled his eyes. "Asshole."

"The peculiar part . . ." Pacheco squinted up at the ceiling. "No. I'll get to that later."

Pacheco drew a large square on his legal pad.

"You know why I like investigating homicides?" Pacheco didn't wait for Irish to begin to answer. "It's because sometimes they're like their own little world."

Irish's eyes glazed over.

"A little too abstract." Pacheco drummed his fingers on the table, his face brightened. "How about this? We're about the same age. You ever read those kids' crime novels when you were growing up?"

Irish didn't respond. Pacheco guessed he finally caught on to playing the part of a suspect, one who already invoked.

Pacheco continued. "The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew and those locked room puzzles. I liked those a lot when I was a kid. A dead guy in a locked

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room and you had to figure out what happened just from the evidence inside those four little walls."

Pacheco drew four small circles in the square.

"Except in this case, in our little world, there's more than one person inside. One of them is dead, but there's still three left."

Pacheco looked up at Irish. "Just nod if you're still with me."

Irish tried to look impatient. "If that's what it takes to get this over with."

"I'll take that as a nod," Pacheco said. "Now, as long as the survivors don't say anything that conflicts with the physical evidence, then they can claim whatever they want about what happened inside. They can make up any kind of story. Any kind. And I mean that, literally." Pacheco squinted up toward the ceiling again. "Or maybe it's figuratively." Pacheco smiled. "I guess it depends on whether they're telling the truth."

Irish's eyes flickered.

"I know what you're thinking," Pacheco said. "There's different kinds of physical evidence." Pacheco knew that wasn't at all what Irish was thinking. "One kind is what you could call intrinsic evidence. You know what intrinsic means."

Irish nodded even though it wasn't a question.

"Like blood spatter and gunshot residue and slugs in walls. If those fit together right, maybe they don't actually prove self-defense like what Billy says happened, but at least they don't contradict it. So we can't use that kind of evidence against him."

Pacheco raised his eyebrows and tilted his head toward the empty chair. Irish looked at his watch, put on a sour face, then walked over and sat down.

Pacheco pushed on. "Then there's what we might call extrinsic evidence. Things that connect the little inside world to the big outside world. Like chemical receipts, like when people are cooking meth in a garage. Like what Mucker was doing."

"You learn all this shit in detective school?" Irish asked. "Or you just make it up as you go along?"

"A little of each," Pacheco answered. "But hang on a little longer so I can get to the peculiar part."

Irish glanced at the door. "I know where I want to get."

Pacheco ignored him. "The peculiar part is that Billy and his brother left something really important out of their story. Really important." Pacheco displayed mock puzzlement. "I wonder what that could be?"

Irish grinned at Pacheco. "Was that a rhetorical question?"

"Of course. I only ask rhetorical questions of suspects."

"Suspect? I'm not sure anymore what I'm suspected of."

"Nothing."

"Then why am I a suspect?"

"Because you signed the Miranda form."

"I only signed it because I thought you were accusing me of killing Mucker."

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"You know I wasn't accusing you. Billy already said he did it. I told you, all you can be is a witness."

"What about the 148.9?"

"We agreed that was chicken shit."

Irish threw up his hands. He reached across the desk, grabbed the form, then tore it up. "Then why are we going through all this?"

"We're going through all of this to get to the peculiar part." Pacheco again drummed his fingers, this time ending with a thump of his forefinger. "That's why."

"It's like this." Pacheco leaned forward, folding his arms on the table. "Every time I've investigated a case where the killer claimed self-defense, the suspect is begging me: 'Go ask Tommy or Johnny or Sonny. They saw the whole thing.' No exceptions. Not in twenty-seven years wearing a badge. The more witnesses the better. Always. They know the weight of testimony is exponential—I assume you know what exponential means."

"Was that a question?"

"You can answer questions now. You tore up the Miranda form."

"I know what exponential means."

"And that's just the way it plays out in court. Exponential—" Pacheco spread his hands. "—it's like when snitches testify. One snitch, the jury believes sometimes—sometimes not. They always wonder if the snitch is lying for money or to get out of jail. But five snitches, juries always believe—even if all of them are getting paid off with cash or get-out-of-jail-free cards."

"I ain't no snitch."

"I didn't say you were. I was just using an analogy. It's just a way of saying that you'd think Billy and his brother would want to have as many people supporting their story as possible. Maybe they could've kept themselves from getting arrested in the first place. In fact, I've been sitting at my desk for days waiting for them to call, begging me, 'Go ask Irish. Go ask Irish,' but there they are, sitting in jail, silent as sleeping snakes." Pacheco exhaled loudly. "Makes you wonder. Doesn't it?"

Irish propped his elbows on the table, then rested his chin on his folded hands.

Pacheco pulled out the ID tech's report. A diagram of the garage on the first page, arrows pointing to where shell casings and blood spatter were found. He then withdrew crime scene photos showing a tire iron in Mucker's right hand.

"Billy's self-defense story is perfect," Pacheco said. "It precisely matches the little world of the garage crime scene. Preeee-cisely. Mucker comes after him with the tire iron, and bang-bang he's dead. Billy's even got a bruise on his forehead."

Irish glanced at his fingerprint on the Burger King receipt.

"Exactly," Pacheco said, "but they didn't know you left that little gem behind."

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Pacheco withdrew another latent fingerprint. "Or this one from the tire iron in Mucker's hand." He held it up. "Whose print do you think this is?"

Irish laughed. "You know how many times I've been in Mucker's garage in the last twenty years. Hundreds. I've been there seven, eight times just since we got out of the joint. My fingerprints are all over that place."

"I know that," Pacheco said. "That's why you're not a suspect."

Irish nodded. "Damn right."

"In fact, the chances are slim we'll even convict Billy. All Billy has to do is get up on the witness stand and his statement to me comes in. It's the rules of evidence. He tells the jury, 'I told the detective right away it was self-defense. He just refused to listen to me.' Then Billy's brother hops up there and corroborates it. And the jurors look over at me thinking, 'You idiot. He told you it was self-defense and you can't impeach him with the crime scene evidence. That's called reasonable doubt. Why are you wasting our time?' They take his statement into the deliberation room and it sits there like a pothole too big to drive around. Chances are pretty good we lose and he walks out the door." Pacheco shrugged. "Knowing all that, I think the D.A. will probably tell me to cut them loose; never even make them go to court."

Pacheco rose, then paced the room like a college professor following a train of thought.

"But, still, you've got to ask yourself why they left you out of the story." Pacheco stopped, then looked at Irish. "If it was me, I know I would be asking myself that. Exponential is exponential. One more witness makes it a slam dunk not guilty—especially if that witness isn't a blood relative. That's what I'd want if I was facing life in prison. I'd want a sure thing. After all, they're not forensic scientists, they don't know if they've accounted for every spot of blood, every bruise, every fingerprint, every greasy footprint on the garage floor." Pacheco jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "In fact, I'll bet they're wondering about that very thing sitting over there in the jail."

Irish picked up the Burger King receipt. "Maybe the guy who dropped this came and left before the shooting," Irish said. "Maybe there wasn't no other witness."

Pacheco shook his head. "Not possible. I timed the ride from Burger King. It's twenty minutes away driving—and the guy who owns that fingerprint never walks. Neighbors heard Harleys ride up, but none left until a minute after the shooting." Pacheco paused, then glanced at the receipt. "The timing says the finger that made this print was there when Mucker got killed."

Irish didn't argue.

Pacheco paced again without speaking for a full fifteen seconds. He finally stopped, then turned toward Irish. "So the question is, why didn't they mention you were there?"

Irish didn't answer.

"How about this: They had about a week to get their stories together

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before we arrested them, what with us having to process all the fingerprints and DNA, then finding the shack where they were holed up. And all that time they knew they'd get in even deeper shit if they gave the name of a Hell's Angel to a cop, trying to use him as a witness. HA's kill for that."

Irish nodded slowly. Nobody's stupid enough to commit that kind of suicide.

Pacheco furrowed his eyebrows and pursed his lips. "But I'm not sure that had anything to do with why they exercised your right to remain silent." Pacheco raised a finger. "I've got another theory."

"I figured." Irish put on an exasperated expression.

Pacheco paused, hands extended toward Irish, ready to reframe the question. "You ever watch soap operas?" Pacheco asked.

"I don't bother with that crap."

"If you did, you'd know what they do when they're going to kill off a character."

"What do they do?"

"What do they do?" Pacheco smiled, anticipating the punch line. "They just write him out of the story."

Irish dropped his hands to the table. Pacheco finally got his attention.

"And you know how the guy playing the part finds out?"

"No. How does the poor unemployed bastard find out?"

Pacheco reached into an envelope and pulled out Billy Willis's signed statement, then slid it across the table. "Somebody shows him the script."

"I didn't think Billy and his brother be coming after me that fast," Irish told Pacheco two weeks later in the same interrogation room.

"Me either. The D.A. only dropped the charges yesterday afternoon. It even crossed my mind that they might chicken out, load up their Harley saddlebags, and make a run for it." Pacheco focused on the bruise above Irish's left eye. "What happened?"

"Depends who I am this time."

"That's up to you. But you've been a suspect for so many years it's kind of hard for me to think of you as victim."

Irish grinned. "It's a new part for me too."

"All I know at this point is that the crime scene guys said there must have been a hell of a struggle. Looked just like the inside of Mucker's garage, but a whole lot bloodier—and of course, it's Billy and his brother that's laying there dead."

Irish held his grin. "I think you got yourself another one of those locked-room puzzles."

"Then it's pretty much in your hands to tell me what happened."

"I don't think so." Irish leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. "I'm gonna invoke my rights. The way I figure it, it worked perfect last time. Just . . . perfect."

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Pacheco reached into his folder and pulled out a Miranda form. He wrote the Willis brothers' homicide case number at the top, then slid it over to Irish, who signed it and slid it back.

Irish started to stand, but Pacheco froze him with a raised palm. "There's something I should tell you, so you'll know what you're facing."

"What's that?" Irish dropped back into his chair.

"There's a witness."

Irish grinned again, this time broader, almost taunting. "There were *two* witnesses, and now they're dead."

"That's what I mean."

Irish's grin turned to cardboard, his eyes narrowed.

"I told you Billy's statement matched the physical evidence," Pacheco said. "But I didn't say it was true." It was Pacheco's turn to grin. "It took me a few days, but I figured it out." Pacheco paused. Even after all those years interrogating suspects, he still enjoyed the dramatic moment.

One, one thousand.

Two, one thousand.

Three, one thousand.

"You killed Mucker—"

Irish sat up. "Bullshit—"

"Still pissed off that he wouldn't take the fall in the grenade case. They were his, right? Cost you six years of your life."

Irish clenched his jaw.

"So when Mucker went after Billy in the garage, you said to yourself, 'I ain't going down again.' A heartbeat later, you splattered Mucker's brains all over his workbench. Then you made those two weasels cover for you. Billy wrote you out of the script because you told him you'd kill him if he left you in."

"I think my lawyer would call that wild speculation, maybe even—"

"Then you got to thinking after we talked two weeks ago. You reckoned that Billy and his brother would roll on you the first time they got caught dirty. It wouldn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out. Even I knew they cut and ran in Reno, leaving real Hell's Angels bleeding out in the street. Punks like that are afraid to do time. You know it. I know it. They know it . . . well, knew it." Pacheco jabbed a forefinger at Irish. "You started kicking yourself: 'Why didn't I just cap all three? Not leave any witnesses.'"

"That's even wilder—"

"And a couple miles away, Billy and his brother were sitting in jail shaking like toy poodles, thinking you'd come after them as soon as they got out. They decided to make the first move and hit you before you hit them, but you were lying in wait." Pacheco pointed at the bruise on Irish's forehead. "And I'll bet you've got a first-rate self-defense story all made up, just like the one you put together for Billy."

"You're going off the deep end. I wasn't even there when he killed Mucker."

"Your fingerprints were all over the place. We agreed on that last time—"

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"That doesn't mean shit—"

"But that's not what's going to send you to the joint for the rest of your life. What's going to send you away is that you lied about being there at all." Pacheco shook his head. "Stupid, stupid thing to do. Jury's going to decide that only a guilty man would lie about that. Should've kept your mouth shut."

Irish laughed, dismissing Pacheco with a wave of his hand. "You can't use what I said. The court'll throw it out in a heartbeat. I invoked."

Pacheco removed an envelope from the inside pocket of his sports jacket, then dumped the torn up Miranda form on the table.

Irish's voice turned hard. "Don't screw with me, asshole. That was because you said I was a witness, not a suspect."

Pacheco smiled sheepishly. "I guess I was wrong."

Irish opened his mouth to speak, but stopped. He stared at Pacheco for a long moment, then smiled to himself as he settled back in his chair. "Nice try, pal, but no cigar. You should've made this move when Billy was still alive. All you got left is Billy's statement saying he killed Mucker. And he ain't around no more to contradict it."

Pacheco shook his head. "That's not how it works. I guess you weren't paying attention last time."

"I hung on your every word."

"Tell me if this sounds familiar: 'All Billy has to do is get up on the witness stand and his statement comes in. It's the rules of evidence.' Same for his brother."

Irish's eyes widened. He wasn't a rocket scientist, but the causes and effects snapped together in three quick jolts: No Billy. No testimony. No statement.

"It's like it never existed," Pacheco said.

Irish's body froze in his chair, but his eyes darted around as if looking for a physical escape from a legal straitjacket.

Pacheco shook his head slowly. "I can't believe in all your cases your lawyer never told you that."

Irish's eyes stopped moving.

"But maybe he didn't need to," Pacheco said.

One, one thousand.

Two, one thousand.

Three, one thousand.

"You said it yourself a couple of minutes ago."

One, one thousand.

Two, one thousand.

Irish licked his lips.

"There were two witnesses," Pacheco said, "and now they're dead."

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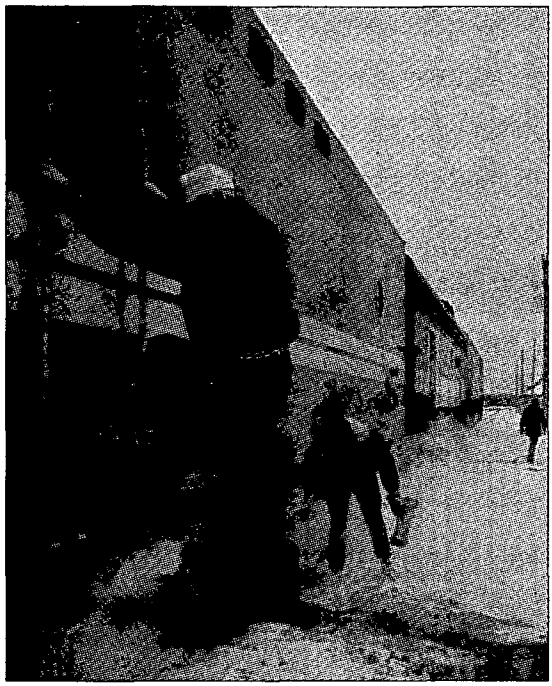
Mysterious Photograph



Paul Souders/Images.com

Railroaded

We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime) based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to AHMM, Dell Magazines, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Please label your entry "April Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the October Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 109.

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PRICE TAG ATTACHED

O'Neil De Noux
and Kent Westmoreland

Burleigh Drummond knew something was wrong.

A glance at his antique Patek Philippe watch declared the time was approaching midnight, yet the front door to Le Petit Antique Shop was ajar. No one in the French Quarter left their doors unlocked at night, much less open. Reasoning discretion was the smarter part of valor, he parked his Porsche Carrera on a side street, then walked up a narrow alley that ran along the side of the shop's building.

Still believing in discretion he pushed front door open with his foot and stepped inside; his elbow nudged the door shut. The soles of his Italian shoes struck the hardwood floor and echoed against the shop's fourteen-foot ceiling. After his eyes adjusted to the dark, Drummond cupped his hands and called Hal Dean Wilson's name. A feline whimper careened through the silent building.

A solitary golden glow beckoned Drummond to the rear of the shop; he followed the light to Wilson's office. The antique dealer sat upright in a Louis XV chair behind a matching desk, his palms lying flat against the green marble top. A yellow banker's lamp illuminated his face. Wilson stared with wide open eyes, but could see nothing. Probably because of the knife lodged in his chest. Judging from the ornate hilt, the murder weapon was a kaiken, a Japanese dagger from the Shin Shinto period. Worth about a grand, according to the still-attached price tag.

Wilson's untimely demise had complicated what was to have been a relatively simple, albeit quasilegal, transaction—the purchase, or more accurately *re*purchase, of a stolen marble heart.

The likelihood of the heart being on the premises was about the same as the New Orleans City Council being honest, but Drummond would have been remiss to leave without searching. He pulled a pair of disposable latex gloves from his suit jacket, then rummaged both floors of the building. On the second floor a damaged Fleming Provincial armoire contained two vases, several statues, and urns that once resided in New Orleans cemeteries, but not the purloined heart.

A black cat, the one who'd probably whimpered earlier, peeked out at

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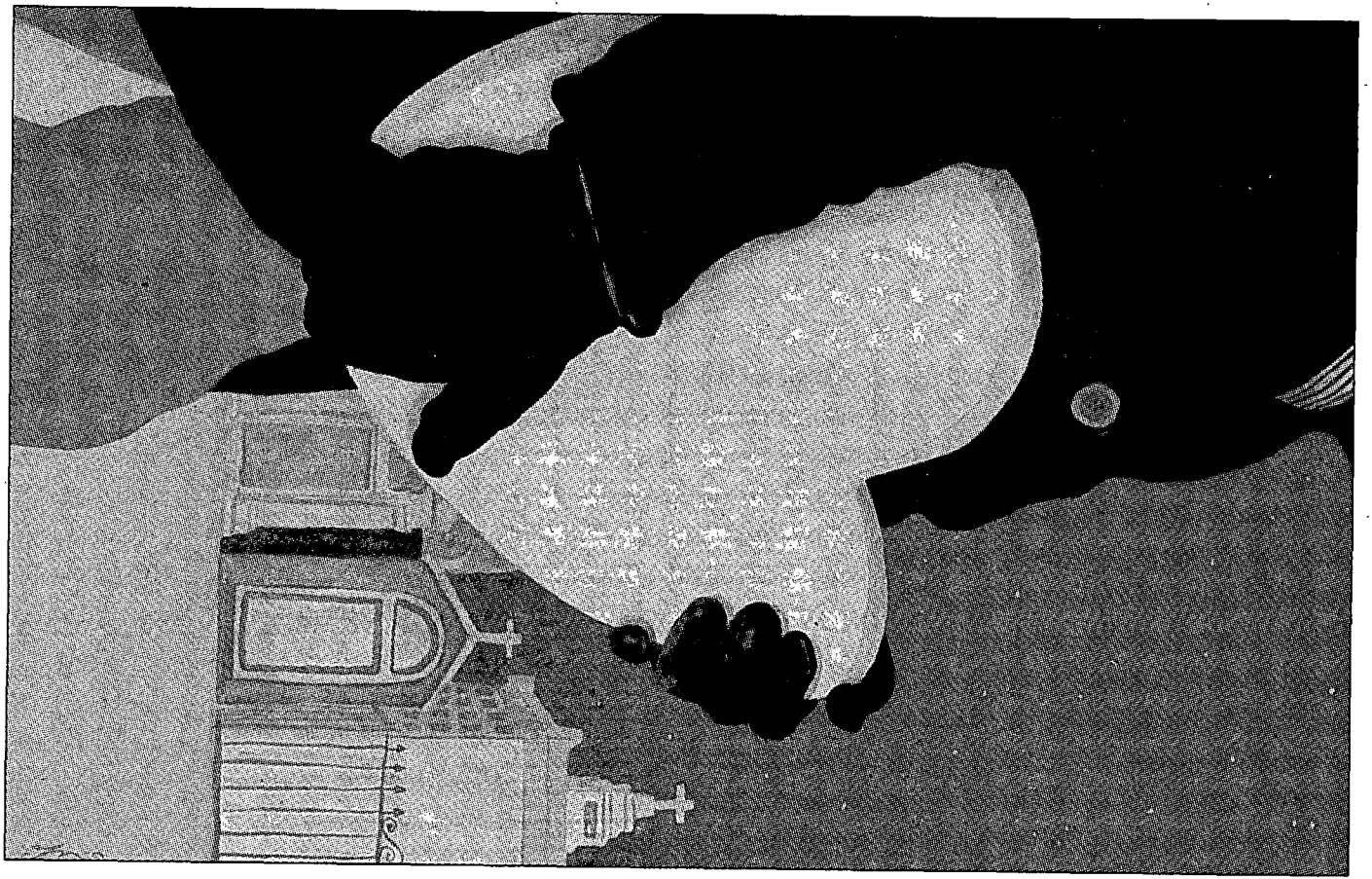
Jorge Mascarenhas



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Drummond from behind the armoire as he stepped away. Its yellow eyes seemed to glow, and for a moment Drummond thought of Edgar Allan Poe. But that cat had only one eye.

After twenty minutes of futile effort, Drummond decided he had pushed his luck enough and left through a side door that led to the alley. He glanced up and down the street. The coast is clear, he thought. How he loved clichés.

"Hey you. Stop!" a man's voice grunted. In the dark doorway of a T-shirt shop stood a man about fifty, wearing a dirty long gray coat. He stumbled toward Drummond with his arms outstretched. An Army knapsack hung from his right arm.

Being spotted at a crime scene was never a good thing.

"Hey, buddy. You got some money for an old soldier?" The garbled words rolled in his mouth like colliding marbles. Drummond handed the homeless man three twenties. Life had treated him more than fairly, and he was willing to share with those who hadn't been so fortunate.

As he drove uptown to his Greek Revival house, Drummond thought about his dilemma—the missing heart. Without its return he wouldn't collect his paycheck, a necessity. Being Burleigh Drummond was expensive.

Wilson was more or less a solid citizen, so the police investigation would look at every angle of his life and possibly find the heart. Drummond parked the Porsche at a K & B drugstore next to a pay phone. Being a civic-minded citizen, he reported the murder, first to the newspaper city desk and ten minutes later to 911.

Drummond could make the investigation work for him. When fate gives you lemons, make lemonade. God, did he love those clichés.

Seated behind her gray metal, government-issue desk, Jodie Kintyre took off her beige suit jacket, draped it across the back of her gray metal chair, and pulled her 9mm Smith & Wesson Model 669 out of its shoulder holster. She slipped her weapon into her briefcase and ran her fingers through her hair. Freshly cut, her pageboy was shorter than normal. At thirty, her blonde hair still needed no touch-ups. It was as yellow gold as it was when she was a little girl and wore it long to her waist.

Jodie turned to watch the crime lab technician dust the murder weapon for fingerprints. Standing over a blotter on the desk next to Jodie's, Officer Johnny Small, who stood six-three, announced, "Couple smudges here."

"What's the price on the tag?" Jodie asked, opening her notebook.

"One thousand dollars." Small let out a high-pitched whistle.

He put the knife on the desk blotter and carefully picked up the knife's curved sheath and dusted it.

"More smudges and," Small paused for emphasis, "two decent latents."

Good, Jodie thought, nothing like a good fingerprint.

As Small spread fingerprint tape over the latents to carefully lift them,

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Jodie picked up the videotape from the crime scene and walked over to the nineteen inch Sony Trinitron TV, on loan from the Burglary Division. The TV was stolen property that should have been in the police evidence room. She inserted the tape into the Zenith video recorder, also on loan from Burglary, and watched the grainy image of the interior of Le Petit Antique Shop come into focus—somewhat.

Jodie had spotted the surveillance camera just inside the door of the antique shop when they were processing the crime scene. It provided a wide-angle view of the store. She touched the rewind button and zipped past the part where she and her partner entered. Detective Paul Snowood, the case officer of this particular murder, looked ridiculous, as usual, in his white Stetson, rawhide-fringe shirt, brown denims, and snakeskin cowboy boots.

She came to the part where the two uniformed officers entered, one with his weapon drawn. She kept rewinding until the man in the long gray coat entered. Pressing the play button, Jodie folded her arms across her chest and watched the man enter, look around for a moment before continuing through the store, looking around until he reached the back room where they'd found the body. The camera showed the doorway, but not inside the room.

The man in the long gray coat paused a moment in the doorway, then went in quickly. He was still in there when the two uniformed officers entered. They found the man standing over the body.

Jodie stopped the tape, pressed REWIND, and let it go to the beginning. It was an hour-long tape that retaped over and over again. She pressed PLAY again and watched the empty antique shop with its glass cases and walls lined with paintings, pictures, and even a wooden airplane propeller.

Backing away from the TV, Jodie went to her desk, pulled out her black coffee mug, and moved to the coffee table. She poured herself a cup of strong coffee, added cream and two packets of Equal, stirred, and took a sip. It was hot, at least.

On her way back to her desk, she watched another man enter the antique shop. Well dressed in an expensive-looking suit, the man was in his late twenties. He looked around and obviously called out. He even put a hand next to his mouth. He continued through the store. Reaching the rear door, he stopped in the doorway but didn't go in. Jodie moved closer to the TV to watch this man search the antique shop before leaving. He was kind enough to look up so she got a good view of his face. Nice looking. Very nice looking.

She timed the tape and ten minutes later the man in the long gray coat entered.

What did the good-looking man see in the back room?

The body, of course.

Jodie removed the tape. As she arrived back at her desk, Johnny Small announced he was finished. He didn't have to tell her, but told her anyway

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that he'd have the fingerprints classified and compared.

A few minutes later, just as Jodie was finishing her notes, Paul Snowood burst from the small interview room next to the coffee pot. Twirling his Stetson, Snowood announced, "Another one bites the dust!"

The man in the long coat, hands cuffed behind his back, came slowly out of the interview room. Snowood told him to stand next to the wall.

When Snowood arrived at his desk, across from Jodie's, she had to ask, "He copped?"

"All but." Snowood opened his briefcase and put his portable tape recorder inside. "Sumbitch's got a rap sheet six pages long. He's on parole for manslaughter."

As Snowood started back for his prisoner, Jodie raised a finger and said, "There might be problem."

"No problem, little lady. I'm gonna book this bastard and then I'm off to the badlands."

Snowood's vacation started as soon as he got off. He'd *'splained* it to her a dozen times how he and his little lady were going to the badlands of Arizona, to a little 'one-horse' town called Whispering Gulch. Might have been New Mexico.

"What about all the loot?"

Snowood came back leading his murderer by the arm.

"I'll sort it out when I get back."

"Fine by me." Jodie had enough work to do without trying to identify the owners of the statues and urns that had obviously been lifted from some New Orleans cemeteries—all found in Le Petit Antiques.

When Snowood stopped, she knew she was in trouble. He turned and gave her a hangdog look, then asked if she'd handle the postmortem for him. "Pa–leeze!"

Sure, why not? Autopsies were so much fun.

Jodie shooed her partner away, agreeing to attend the autopsy of his case, anything to get rid of him and his arrestee as quickly as possible. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, thinking this was why they called Snowood "Country Ass."

They'd been partners for only three months and she was sure she'd go insane if he kept sniffing her, like a damn dog, and calling her a filly and telling her all she needed was a good man or a well-made recliner.

She heard the door of the squad room open but didn't hear footsteps, so she opened her eyes and saw the nice-looking man from the video standing just in the doorway.

The man raised his right hand and said, "I'm looking for Detective Snowood."

He didn't have a visitor's pass, but that wasn't surprising. Few visitors did.

Jodie waved him over. She reached into her briefcase, withdrew her weapon, and slid it back in its holster. Standing as he approached, she told him she was Snowood's partner. The words almost stuck in her throat.

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"I have some information for Detective Snowood." The man's dark brown eyes stared intently into hers.

"What about?"

"About the murder last night at Le Petit Antiques."

Jodie extended her hand and told him her name.

"Hi, I'm Burleigh Drummond," he said as he shook her hand.

So this is what he looks like, Jodie thought. What's he called? Not a P.I., but a "fixer," a problem solver. She'd heard it several times from big shot New Orleanians, "Burleigh Drummond is fixing the situation for me."

She didn't expect Drummond to be so young and so good looking.

The man sat in Snowood's chair. Jodie immediately noticed his Patek Philippe watch and expensive, handmade lace-up, Italian shoes. She waited for him to continue and he didn't disappoint her.

"I read in the morning paper that the owner of Le Petit was murdered last night. I have reason to believe he was in possession of marble statues stolen from cemeteries."

"How do you know this?"

Carefully, Burleigh Drummond explained how word was "on the street" that Hal Dean Wilson was trafficking in loot stolen from several of New Orleans's world-famous aboveground cemeteries. Not naming his client, Burleigh went on to describe one particular piece, a heart of Grecian marble.

"We didn't find anything like that at the crime scene," Jodie said as she carefully watched Burleigh's eyes. "You didn't either, when you searched the place, did you?"

His face didn't react, no flinch, no tick, but she saw something in his eyes, a slight movement of the pupils. Pointing to the videotape next to her briefcase, Jodie told him where she's secured that particular tape.

Nodding slowly, Burleigh let out a long breath.

"You must have seen I didn't enter the back room."

Jodie nodded.

"He was dead when I got there. The knife was buried to the hilt in his chest."

Which meant Wilson was dead before Snowood's arrestee entered.

Jodie narrowed her cat-eyes and said, "We have some talking to do, mister."

"I'm always willing to cooperate with the authorities, Detective Jodie."

"Detective Kintyre."

Burleigh Drummond had enough experience with law enforcement to know they generally weren't stupid, regardless of the image Hollywood foisted on the world. His instinct told him this officer was extremely sharp, so he'd cooperate with her. Up to a point. Besides, Detective Jodie was hot.

"I was having drinks with friends at Whiskey Blue," Drummond began his tale. "Have you been there?" He was normally less reticent about asking a woman out. But then he usually didn't ask out women who were

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proficient in the use of a nightstick.

He waited for her to answer. She stared at him. Crestfallen, he continued: "I was approached and told that Hal Dean Wilson had a statue he wanted to sell and I was asked to buy it; the price was already agreed upon. I called Wilson. We arranged a time and place. When I got there he was dead. It's that simple."

"You expect me to believe a smart operator like you knowingly agreed to buy stolen merchandise? That kind of activity could get you an orange jumpsuit. I can't see you being in that, but the image appeals to me."

"That's funny. I was just imagining you in your uniform." Actually, he was imagining her wearing only her gun belt, but saw no advantage in being that candid.

"Don't change the subject. Why would you receive stolen merchandise?"

"I was buying it back for the owner. That's not against the law. It's not even unethical. Though not too bright on the part of the owner."

That was true.

"Why wouldn't the owner go to the police and get his marble heart back for free and the thief arrested?"

"The owner could be a woman. You said *his*."

The detective frowned. "Answer the question."

"I suggested the police but was told if the police became involved the object in question would get tagged as evidence and returned to the owner when the trial was over—a year or two in the future. That's assuming the statue didn't disappear from the NOPD evidence room through corruption or, more likely, incompetence. Please keep in mind those views are not my own."

While what he said was true, he didn't tell all. The rest would have revealed the identity of his client. The missing statue, a heart carved from Grecian marble, had been stolen about a week before. A photograph appeared in the newspaper; a Tulane University art professor theorized the statue had been carved by a seventeenth-century Italian artist and estimated the value at two hundred fifty thousand dollars. CNN and *Time* magazine became interested in the theft. Drummond's client didn't want his (or her) business in the street. Rich people have peculiar ideas about themselves and their privacy. Drummond's willingness and, more importantly, his ability to satisfy those peculiarities ensured him a comfortable lifestyle.

"I want to talk to your client to confirm your story."

"I can't reveal the name. Professional ethics. Client privilege. You know stuff like that."

"This is a murder case. Private detectives don't have that kind of privilege. And I'm not even sure you're a licensed private detective."

Drummond smiled. "The state of Louisiana has issued me a license. My federal and state tax returns validate that claim."

With patience absent from her voice, she repeated herself. "This is a murder case. Private detectives don't have that kind of privilege."

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The point where Drummond had to lie to Detective Jodie had arrived. Fortunately, he was up for the job. "An attorney retained me for this job." He didn't insult her intelligence by explaining to her the attorney's privilege extended to him; she already knew that.

"What's the attorney's name? I'll need to check that out."

"Let's do it now." Drummond reached into his jacket and removed his cell phone and pressed a preset number.

"Give me the name. I'll do the dialing. And the talking." All traces of patience had vanished from her voice.

Drummond knew Detective Jodie was hip to him. The client had hired Drummond directly, and not at a nightclub, which didn't provide any confidentiality. Fortunately, Drummond had foreseen this imbroglio and planned for it.

"Leonard Roose is the attorney."

She nodded. Roose was a partner at one of the old-line firms.

Jodie looked up the number and dialed it from her desk phone. She identified herself and asked for Roose; the receptionist said he was unavailable. Drummond motioned for Jodie to hand him the handset; she did.

"Marie, this is Burleigh Drummond. Please tell Leonard I'm with the detective and we would like to speak with him."

"Sure, Burr. No problem."

Drummond flipped his palms upward. A crinkle formed across Detective Jodie's brow. For some reason Drummond thought the crinkle was sexy.

The receptionist transferred and the lawyer greeted them.

Drummond passed the phone to the detective, who took over. "I'm here with Burleigh Drummond. He says you retained him to retrieve some stolen merchandise for a client." She paused and waited for Roose to talk.

The lawyer laughed. "Burr, surely, didn't use the word stolen. The object in question is missing, not stolen. My office retained Burr to pick up the object and pay a finder's fee. Nothing illegal there."

"Until the *finder* was murdered and Mr. Drummond was videotaped at the crime scene."

"I didn't know that. Still, Burr has committed no crime and the transaction was legal."

"I'll need to talk to your client about the object."

"I'll check with my client and get back with you."

Drummond could tell she didn't like what Roose had to say, but she couldn't do much about it.

"Thank you. In the meantime, Mr. Drummond and I have a lot to talk about."

Stepping from the brisk air-conditioning of St. John–Smythe Antiques, two doors down from le Petit Antiques, Jodie Kintyre felt a blast of superheated air brush across her face. Funny how summer breezes flowing off the river only made people sweat faster. The lively sound of a paddle-

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wheeler's calliope echoed through the Quarter, an old tune, ragtime.

Thankfully Jodie rarely perspired, especially in a lightweight poplin skirt-suit. She stepped out of the way of three wandering tourists: a man in a yellow tropical shirt and matching shorts, a woman in a matching get-up, and a bored-looking daughter in a low-cut top and cutoff jeans.

Moving to the next shop along Royal, Jodie glanced across the narrow street at Drummond as he leaned against the wall of a Greek cafe. She nodded almost imperceptibly and he responded with a slight nod. As she opened the door of the next antique shop, she saw Drummond crossing the street in a straight line for St. John–Smythe Antiques.

Because of Burleigh Drummond's knowledge of the antique business, Detective Jodie offered him the opportunity to help her. Because he had been videotaped lurking around a murder scene, he accepted. His job was to chat up the Royal Street shopkeepers about the murder and the cemetery thefts while she canvassed the area. Jodie believed the shopkeepers might reveal something to a "charming rogue" (her words, not his) that an investigating officer would never hear. They planned to compare notes later.

A silver bell chimed when Drummond opened the door of St. John–Smythe Antiques, the fourth shop he had entered that morning. A Beethoven sonata flowed around the crown molding of the fourteen-foot ceiling. An overworked air conditioner and patchouli incense couldn't prevent the musk of crammed, ancient furniture from creeping into his nose.

Maria St. John–Smythe pressed a telephone receiver against her ear. Her voice descended into a whisper; she extended her index finger upward. He took this as request for privacy and stood by the front door, but focused his hearing in her direction. Sudden drops in voice volume always piqued his interest.

While eavesdropping, he picked up a Tiffany fork from an open silverware case. Drummond rubbed his fingers across the Chrysanthemum pattern. Judging from the weight and the workmanship the set was crafted in the early 1880s.

He overheard Maria mumble something about resubmitting a check. Maria finished her call and said, "That silverware would look stunning with that Louis XVI dining room set I sold you. I can let you have service for sixteen at a real steal."

"That table only seats eight." He smiled. "Besides, I don't have sixteen friends."

She laughed and mentioned a price—a price considerably lower than the price tag attached to the box. Generally a dealer wouldn't make a low offer unless they needed money. Maybe that was why she was resubmitting a check.

"Silverware is *not* what I'm looking for today." He draped his words with an enigmatic twist and paused to let her ask the next question, one of his favorite ruses.

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Her thin lips stiffened then fell into what looked like a forced smile. "What are you looking for?"

"I want to know about Hal Dean Wilson's business."

Maria's olive eyes flinched and her cheeks twitched. "Everyone on Royal Street has been talking about his murder. It was a shock to us all in the antique community. His presence will be missed." Her voice droned like she was reading a worn-out speech from a teleprompter.

Subtlety wasn't appropriate in this situation, so he didn't attempt it. "Wilson was a third-rate junk dealer. His murder is going to cost me some money. One of my clients is looking for a particular statue, which Wilson claimed he possessed and was enthusiastic about selling. I was hired to broker the deal."

"Seems like an *unusual* transaction." Maria's inflection indicated a euphemism for illegal.

"Well, the statue is valuable and well known. My client is a private person and doesn't want the world to know."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"You might be able to earn some money if we can put the statue in the hands of my client."

"What makes you think I know how to find it?"

"Because I know the antique business. It's a small, competitive world with an incestuous nature. If one dealer is trolling cemeteries for urns and vases, so are others. If you're not involved, you have a good idea who is."

She looked past him at a Hepplewhite sideboard. "A well-known, valuable cemetery statue and a private transaction. Could we be talking about a heart made of Grecian marble?"

Drummond pursed his lips and bulged his eyes in his most coy manner. "What would helping you be worth to me? "

"That depends on what you tell me."

"I know who has it and that he doesn't have the finesse to sell it. But he is smart enough to know that."

Now, that was something worth knowing. "Twenty-five hundred when the statue gets to my client."

"I've sold antiques for twenty-five years, and I haven't survived by being the last person to get paid. Whether your client gets the statue has nothing to do with me. You pay me three thousand now, and I tell you who has the statue."

Drummond knew she needed money so negotiation was an option.

"When the statue is in my hands that's twenty-five hundred to you." He hoped his client would consider this little overage a necessary expense.

Maria shook her head. "I give you a name and I get a thousand now and another fifteen hundred when you get the statue." Her voice told him that was her final offer. He accepted. He always thought he paid too much for that dining room set, now he knew it.

"Danny Dominici. Be careful, Burr. This guy is dangerous."

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Finding lowlifes in New Orleans was no challenge: You just walked out your front door. But when you wanted to find whale dung in the Mariana Trench your destination was Cigar's Tavern on Exchange Alley, a dismal block of darkness on the edge of the French Quarter. Lee Harvey Oswald once lived in the upstairs apartment. Hookers, male hustlers, employment-seeking hitmen, and cemetery thieves like Danny Dominici wallowed in Cigar's mire from dusk to dawn. People who've never had an honest job in their lives lurked there. Burleigh Drummond realized he fell into that category. Oh, well, he'd get over the shame.

When Drummond walked into the bar his nostrils filled with thick smoke from tobacco, grass, and crack, odors that would make Old Scratch step outside for fresh air. His eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he surveyed the barroom for someone who matched the description of Dominici. His eyes stopped at the blue and red neon-drenched bar. Posed with a Dixie longneck in one hand and a pool cue in the other stood Dominici. His black hair was tied into a ponytail streaming from the crown of his head; a Fu Manchu mustache attempted to conceal thin lips. The size of his biceps and his reputed violent temper made Drummond reconsider what no longer seemed like a viable plan. But he had no better plan so he moved close, but not too close, to Dominici and ordered two Dixies. He called Dominici's name and pushed a beer toward him.

"You look like an undertaker in that suit, chump," Dominici said without looking at him. "I don't talk to ghouls."

Drummond started to mention that morticians don't wear Hugo Boss wool crepe suits, but wasn't sure the statement would be accurate.

"Hal Dean Wilson said you and I could finish what he started." Drummond tipped his Dixie.

"Wilson tell you that when you were switching his blood with formaldehyde?"

Obviously engaging Dominici in pleasant conversation wasn't going to work, so Drummond changed tactics. "I want the marble heart you lifted from Lafayette Cemetery."

The bartender picked up a bar rag and strolled to the far end of the bar; this conversation wasn't his concern.

Dominici slapped the thick end of the pool cue in his palm and turned toward Drummond. "What's going to stop me from taking your wallet and your virginity?"

Drummond took a pull from his beer and gave what he hoped was the right answer. "Wouldn't be worth the effort. I got less than a hundred on me; you'd blow it all on strippers before dawn. And street talk says I'm a bad lay." He tipped his beer toward Dominici. "But the main reason is there's real money to be made."

"Tell me something I'll believe."

"I'm being paid to retrieve the statue and my sources tell me you can get the elusive marble heart."

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"What's my cut?"

"Two-thousand. But you pay your own expenses."

"Why you so generous?"

"I'm not generous; I'm realistic. Without you I got nothing to sell. Without me you got a statue you can't sell. Both of us come up with empty pockets. I try to shortchange you, you stick a knife in my chest. But more importantly for you, no money." Drummond paused to let the words sink in. "I give you a big enough piece of the pie then maybe you won't do something stupid. Both of us make money."

A vein pulsed in Dominici's forehead, as if he were thinking, Besides a quick buck, what's in it for me? A girl's got to think about her future.

Drummond liked Dominici's question. Simply asking for a larger cut would have meant he was greedy and stupid, a combination too unpredictable for Drummond's preference. Since he wanted more than a one-time boost, Drummond could tantalize and manipulate the thug. But it would involve a lie or two. "Thinking of the future, huh? You seem to know how to get in and out of places without making the papers. We can do a more sophisticated version of what you and Wilson were doing. With you as partner, not a lackey."

"You make this deal sound too good to be true. How do I know you not a cop?"

"'Cause you've seen enough cops to know they don't wear two-thousand dollar suits. Even the crooked ones."

His head bobbed. He looked like he wanted to believe Drummond but didn't have enough reason. He was sharper than the average thug.

"People around town know my reputation. Ask about me." Drummond pushed a card with his name and cell phone number along the bar. "You'll find I'm as honest as you, just at a different level."

He said he would check Drummond out and gave a parting shot: "If I kill you, I won't use a knife. I'm a bullet-to-the-brain kinda guy."

Burleigh Drummond's two story Greek Revival home stood at the corner of Valence and Prytania Streets, one block off St. Charles Avenue, a ritzy uptown neighborhood dotted with the occasional mansion and the occasional estate. It was exactly ten blocks from the skinny shotgun double Jodie shared with her parents on Milan Street, her on one side, them on the other, no yard to speak of, barely enough room to park a car between the houses.

Jodie parked her unmarked LTD in front of the Greek Revival, went through the wrought-iron gate and up twelve steps to the front gallery, smelling gardenias from the garden surrounding the house. She rang the doorbell next to the solid wood door, carved in an intricate mosaic.

Drummond, in gauzy khaki pants, a white linen shirt, and brown loafers, let her in with a friendly smile. He led her across a marble foyer into a room off to her right, an office with a huge antique wooden desk, dark green captain's chair behind it, two empire chairs facing the desk. A thick

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Persian carpet covered the oak floor. They moved through pocket doors into a living room beyond the office.

"What can I get for you?" Drummond asked as he moved to a wet bar.

"I brought coffee," Jodie said, lifting the brown paper bag in her left hand. "Café DuMonde."

"Great," he said, waving to the sofa for her to sit.

Jodie put the bag on a highly polished dark wood coffee table that stood between matching sofas facing one another. She glanced at the cozy chair on the outer rim of the sofa, which formed a conversation pit. She opted for the far side of the sofa away from the chair.

She dug out the coffees as Drummond sat across from her, passing a café-au-lait to him, along with packs of sugar and Equal. Jody used Equal; Drummond used neither.

"So," she said. "Tell me."

As soon as Drummond started telling her about Dominici, Jodie felt her face flush in anger.

"Maria kept that tidbit from me!"

Drummond shrugged. "You weren't offering her ill-gotten gains." He went on to describe his meeting with Dominici.

"I want to come with you when you pick up the statue," she told him. "I'll dress accordingly," she added before he could complain. "A distraction."

She saw his eyebrows rise and she knew exactly what she would wear.

"May I use your phone?"

He gestured toward his Louis XIV desk near the center of the room. Jodie called headquarters and learned Daniel Jay Dominici had a three page rap sheet, including two extortion arrests and two armed robbery arrests. All were nol-prossed by the ever-efficient D.A.'s office. Dominici had one conviction ten years ago, aggravated battery on a police officer. Served six years at Angola.

As she hung up, she changed her mind on what to wear. Why give a scumbag like Dominici a thrill? But as she finished her coffee, watching Drummond's eyes playing with hers, she decided she'd go for it. Give 'em all a thrill.

She made it home in time to shower and shave her legs, fluff her hair. Standing in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom, Jodie checked herself out. Her white blouse was low cut enough to gap nicely when she leaned over, but looked proper when she stood. Her long, fitted black skirt looked just as proper until she sat. It was a wraparound, which opened all the way to her waist if she didn't close it with her hands. Sitting on her bed, facing the mirror, she could see her the entire front of her white panties when she sat, as well as the tops of her sheer, thigh-high stockings.

Satisfied, she stood and slipped her 9mm Beretta into her purse, climbed into a pair of spike heels, and headed for the meeting place.

"This is a gay bar." Detective Jodie Kintyre's blue eyes surveyed the

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landscape of the Back Door Lounge. Burleigh Drummond sipped his Bombay Sapphire and tonic and winked.

Under the neon glow of rainbow colors three Muscle-Marys racked balls on the pool table. At the bar sat a delicate looking man sipping a champagne cocktail while exchanging furtive glances with the leather-clad bartender. At a corner table a man dressed as Liza Minnelli cried into a cell phone and dabbed her eyes with a linen handkerchief. On the jukebox Cher lamented about the everyday problems of gypsies, tramps, and thieves.

"I suspect Dominici thought the location would intimidate me, but he didn't know I was bringing a bodyguard." Drummond grinned. "Dominici is gay. At our initial meeting he offered to take my virginity and referred to himself as a girl. Little details like those pique my interest, so I made a few discreet inquiries. Danny began his criminal career rolling gays in the French Quarter. Somewhere along the line he switched teams."

A firm thigh slid out of the slit in Jodie's black wraparound skirt, which aroused Drummond's prurient interest.

The front door of the barroom swung open and a shaft of orange light pierced the sinister dark of the room. Dominici swaggered through the doorway with a machismo-draped gait that appeared much too choreographed. His long strides were affected and his shoulders swung in an exaggerated arc set on an unnaturally upright spine. A mesh black T-shirt and tight black jeans hugged his rangy frame.

Without looking, Dominici strutted toward Drummond and Jodie. A probable confederate inside the bar must have supplied him with the lay-of-the-land. Liza's eyes were now dry and she sipped a martini straight up.

Dominici narrowed his stride as he approached the table where Drummond and Jodie sat. After stopping he checked her out. The assessment didn't seem sexual, but the sizing up of a situation or an adversary, standard criminal modus operandi. He sniffed twice in obvious exaggeration and turned to Drummond. "Where did you hook the tuna?"

Drummond directed his eyes toward the detective. "And you thought Mr. Dominici would not be refined."

"We didn't agree on no threesome," Dominici said.

Whipping out his most sardonic smile, Drummond leaned back and pointed to Jodie with his thumb. "Allow me to introduce Detective Jodie Kintyre of the NOPD."

"So why's she here?"

Drummond knew cops didn't scare this desperado. "She's my bodyguard."

"Why you need a cop to protect you?"

"Why do you need a drag queen to scope out the situation for you?" Drummond saluted Liza with his drink; she reciprocated by tipping her glass.

Dominici hooked a chair with a suede cowboy boot and sat down. "I checked you out. Like you said, you're a crook. Just on a different level."

"I would not have referred to myself as a crook."

"All meat smells the same when it's rotten. You don't have a record, but

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the cops and the D.A.'s don't like you," snarled Dominici.

"The crooked ones do. I tip well."

"Yeah, some strippers told me about your tipping. You and Ben Franklin are called the biggest suckers on Bourbon Street."

Jodie shot Drummond a wait-till-we-get-home look.

Drummond feigned a stammer and said, "It's all business."

"Jackass business." Jodie's disdain sounded almost genuine.

Dominici snorted a laugh at what he perceived was Drummond's woman problem. "In bed with Jane Law. You might be as low down as I heard. Now why you need a cop?"

"Until we develop some mutual trust, Detective Jodie and her Beretta make sure you don't stick a knife in my ribs, take the money, keep the heart, and repeat the routine on someone else."

"We already had this discussion. Knives are too much work." He rocked the chair on its back legs, a sign of comfort with the situation.

Dominici looked at Jodie long and hard, starting with her face, stopping briefly at her breasts. She'd positioned her legs just enough to reveal her white panties. Dominici took advantage of the opportunity and presumably reminisced about the old, straight days.

Dominici ordered a Red Ass ale; Drummond raised his index finger and started to make one of his self-styled witticisms, but considered the thug's demeanor and just smiled. Dominici flirted with Jodie while he drank his beer and made a few jokes at Drummond's expense; he was strangely charming. When the bottle was empty, he stood up and said, "Tea time, girls."

As they walked out, Liza wiggled her fingers good-bye. Only Drummond had the manners to return the gesture as they followed Dominici outside to a parking lot across the street. He pointed to a late-model metallic blue BMW 530i.

Jodie slid her hand into her purse and wrapped it around the handle of her Beretta, her index finger sliding over the trigger. The gun's safety catch was already released in anticipation of this moment.

Reaching the BMW, Dominici pushed a button on his remote and the trunk lid rose, trunk light revealing a marble heart. Dominici stepped between Drummond and the trunk, after all, this was a criminal transaction and certain protocols had to be followed. Drummond pulled an envelope from his pocket and let Dominici see the thick stack of hundred dollar bills inside. Dominici moved aside while Drummond examined the marble heart with a high-intensity flashlight. Convinced this was the genuine article, Drummond passed the envelope to the thief, who stuffed it in his back pocket and said, "If the count is low, I'll find you."

In single, fluid motion, Jodie pulled out the Beretta, stepped back, and aimed it at both men. "Hands up, both of you. You're under arrest."

Sirens howled and a flash of blue preceded two NOPD squad cars careening around the intersection. Four officers exited the cars with deliberate confidence and .40 caliber Glocks.

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Dominici muttered an invective and said, "I knew I couldn't trust you bitches."

"Yeah," Jodie said. "Where'd you get the BMW, ass hole?"

"In my grandfather's day," added Drummond, "when you bought a cop, they stayed bought. What has happened to integrity?"

Jodie led Dominici straight into one of the small windowless interview rooms, took off the cuffs, and told him to have a seat. The tiny room was little more than a closet with a small table and two chairs, the one behind the table for the interviewee had its front legs sawed down a half inch so the suspect would have to struggle to keep from leaning forward, keeping him off balance. A lone telephone had to go through the desk sergeant. The only sign on the pale green wall was a big NO SMOKING sign.

Jodie went back out to where Drummond stood next to her desk, took off the cuffs, and said, "Coffee?"

He narrowed his eyes, a slight smile curling his lips. "That was good. Not telling me didn't give me a chance to play-act it wrong."

She laughed. "Thought you were really under arrest, didn't you?"

"You're very convincing."

To Jodie's surprise, the registered owner of the BMW was Dominici.

They moved to the coffee pot where Jodie poured three cups before asking him to take a seat while she talked with macho-man Dominici. She took two coffees and a cassette recorder into the interview room. When she advised him of his rights again, telling him he was under arrest for possession of stolen things valued in excess of five hundred dollars, a felony, he shrugged. Dominici didn't blink when she added he was a suspect in the first degree murder of Hal Dean Wilson.

At first he never heard of Wilson, had no idea how the marble heart got in the trunk of the car, had no idea what Jodie was talking about. She moved her chair to the side of the desk, eliminating the barrier between them, and pushed on. Eventually Dominici recalled Hal Dean Wilson but seemed to know more about Maria St. John–Smythe.

"They hated each other," he said. Adding he had no direct connection to the cemetery thefts, though he knew Hal and Maria were both boosting the stuff. "Word on the street is they got several runners doing it." Both were hurting for money. Rents along Royal Street were astronomical.

That he knew the word "astronomical" surprised Jodie, who assured him he was going to be booked and she would have a nice long talk with the A.D.A. handling the case. "You roll over on Maria, the D.A. might listen. But if you had anything to do with the murder, there'll be no deal."

She took another half hour on the murder, but Dominici had a pretty good alibi. He was in jail, picked up as a DUI in Jefferson Parish. She knew that already, having checked him out on the police computer, but she pretended she didn't, hoping he might have an idea who slid the knife into Hal Dean Wilson. She left him in the room, saying she'd check his alibi.

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Drummond sat in the chair next to her desk. She refilled her mug before sitting behind her desk. "He has an alibi for the murder. In jail. DUI in JP. But he gave up Maria St. John–Smythe and Hal Dean Wilson as the movers behind the cemetery thefts."

Moving her chair back she crossed her legs, the wrap skirt opening almost to her waist. She watched Drummond's eyes, almost daring him to take a look as she said, "Now you're going to volunteer to wear a wire for us, aren't you?"

The eyebrows furrowed and she could see his mind clicking. "Okay," he said, "Maria St. John–Smythe. That's why the fake arrest. Dominici'll make a call, and she'll think I'm dirty too."

"Exactly. We're going to nail her for these thefts."

"I'll do it under one condition."

She raised her chin.

"I want the marble heart right away. Lock it up here. Log it into evidence. Photograph it, videotape it, whatever, but I want to get it to my client right away. Deal?"

She nodded as her phone rang, reached for it, uncrossing her legs, and caught Drummond sneaking a peek. She had to chuckle.

"If you know how to work it, sometimes it falls in your lap," said Jodie as they walked up Royal Street from where they parked her unmarked car. She pulled out a warrant to show Drummond. "We found two nice fingerprints on the sheath of the murder weapon."

He looked at her with wide eyes.

"Maria St. John–Smythe."

Drummond passed the warrant back. "Maria has a record?"

"She was in the army."

They stopped a few doors up from St. John–Smythe Antiques, and Jodie fixed Drummond's tie, although he didn't need it. She slipped the earpiece into her ear and flipped on the recorder in her purse.

"Say something."

Drummond said, "Something." No cliché shall go unused.

Jodie nodded. The wire worked. She waved Drummond forward and watched him go in the antique shop.

Drummond went straight to the back of the place and handed Maria her reward for turning him onto Dominici. The big woman grinned as she counted the money.

"Glad you're happy," Drummond said, "but I have a problem."

"What?"

"I was with Dominici when he was arrested for killing Wilson."

"Wilson?" Maria seemed genuinely surprised, then grinned even broader. "That's good news. Once the police arrest someone for a big rap like that, they won't mess with the case. The sap walked right into it. Let him fall."

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"They'll try to link me to him and he'll probably sing on us both."

Maria laughed. "Like they're going to use him against us. They need to use *us* against *him*. Understand?" She raised a finger like a schoolteacher. "Why muck up a murder case with thefts from dead people?" She actually bounced on her toes. "Let's you and I expand this little operation. Make some real money."

The bell over the front door rang and they turned as Detective Jodie Kintyre stepped in with two uniformed officers. Maria stuffed the envelope with her money into a desk drawer, then moved out to meet the detective who was holding up a legal-sized sheet of paper.

"We have a search warrant," Jodie said. She nodded to one of the cops who was also a woman. "Search and cuff this lady." Then Jodie moved up to Drummond and took out her handcuffs.

"You're both under arrest." She turned Drummond around and cuffed him, then told the other officer, a man, to search Drummond.

"What's the charge?" Maria protested.

"The money Mr. Drummond just paid you off with. It's marked and we'll find it."

Jodie read Maria her Miranda rights in the stuffy confines of a tiny interview room in the Detective Bureau, the same room Dominici had occupied with the uncomfortable chair with the short front legs. Maria St. John–Smythe signed a waiver of rights form and said, sure she'd talk with Detective Kintyre.

"I got the stuff from Danny Dominici. I didn't know it was stolen. No indication."

"You know the law," Jodie said. "RS 14:69, Illegal Possession of Stolen Things."

Maria leaned forward. "And that law reads that if the offender knew or had good reason to believe the object was stolen I can be charged. I had no reason to believe any of that was stolen."

Jodie smiled. "Pictures of the objects we seized from your shop were in the paper and on TV."

"I didn't see them." Maria folded her arms in a typically defensive posture. Her strong perfume was giving Jodie a headache.

Jodie switched tack. "Tell me about this Burleigh Drummond."

"He's a real slimy character. Smooth with his expensive suits and antique watches, fancy cars. If Dominici was the cemetery thief, then Drummond was his puppetmaster, the one pulling the strings."

Jodie jotted what Maria said in her notes. She looked up and said, "Drummond was at Wilson's murder scene. We have him on videotape."

Maria's eyes lit up and she went on about Drummond. After ten minutes, Jodie left her in the small room for a while. Drummond sat in the chair next to her desk. Jodie poured herself a fresh cup of coffee before sitting at her desk.

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"Anything yet?" Drummond asked.

"She says you're a slimeball."

He gave her that smooth grin. "I can live with that."

A half hour later, Jodie went back into the interview room with a cup of coffee for Maria and a cassette recorder.

"Hope you like it black."

Maria took a hesitant sip as Jodie put the recorder on the table.

"Burleigh Drummond just implicated you in Wilson's murder."

Maria screwed up her face and said, "You believe him?"

Jodie turned on the recorder and started with the date and time before reading Maria her Miranda rights again. Maria agreed on tape to give a statement, and Jodie started the questions with Maria's background, education, business experience before getting to the stolen items, then the night of the murder. Maria reaffirmed she knew nothing about the stolen items nor about the murder of Hal Dean Wilson.

"You need to grill Burleigh Drummond and Danny Dominici about that."

Jodie asked, "When was the last time you were in the rear room of Wilson's shop?"

Maria leaned back but answered after she saw the tape was running. "Never."

"You sure?"

"I'm sure." Maria's voice was lower now.

"Did you ever use the back door of the place, the one that opens to the alley behind Le Petit Antique Shop and your shop?"

"The alley runs though the whole block, and no, I always used the front entrance." Maria's voice rose now.

"Do you know what a kaiken is?"

"No."

"A Japanese dagger from the Shin Shinto period."

"No."

"Did you ever touch a knife in Le Petit?"

"No."

"What about its sheath?"

"No."

Jodie showed Maria a picture of the murder weapon and its sheath. Visible in the picture was the black fingerprint powder on the knife and its curved sheath.

"You ever touch this?"

Maria blanched, sat back, and did not respond.

Jodie leaned closer to the recorder. "I'm showing Maria St. John–Smythe a photo of the Japanese-made kaiken knife and its sheath. They were found in Le Petit Antique Shop, the knife removed from the chest of Hal Dean Wilson by the pathologist at Wilson's autopsy."

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Back to Maria. "Did you ever touch either the knife or its sheath at any time?"

Maria's eyes darted frantically. Jodie wished she'd used a video camera for this statement. She gave Maria another cold smile and said, "So if you were never inside the back room of Le Petit, how did your fingerprints get on the inside door knob?"

Maria just stared back.

"And we found your prints on the murder weapon's sheath."

Still nothing from Maria.

"Don't you watch TV? CSI? Stuff like that."

Maria put her arms on the desk and buried her face in them and Jodie described her actions for the recorder, adding, "I've never seen anyone do this, except in old noir movies."

Jodie went out and handcuffed Drummond to his chair before bringing Maria out. She sat Maria in the other chair in front of her desk, then went to the coffeepot to brew some fresh coffee and chicory.

Brushing tears away from her eyes with her free hand, Maria snarled at Drummond. "She said you tried to pin this on me."

"She said you pinned it on *me*."

"I can explain the fingerprints," she added in a low voice. "I'll get a good lawyer and he'll say I was confused. I'll remember I touched stuff. It's just circumstantial." She glared at Jodie. "I watch CSI and know it's just circumstantial."

Drummond had to grin at her. "You did it?"

Maria blinked twice and sat up a little straighter. "Didn't think this pudgy girl had it in her?"

Jodie was mixing the coffees.

"I'll tell you later." Her voice lower now.

Drummond leaned closer. "*No,* you have to tell me. I've a newfound respect for you."

"So you can testify against me."

Drummond showed her his cuffs. He could see Maria's mind working behind her eyes as she looked at Jodie, then back at him. She leaned closer to him and said, "Hal wouldn't play along. Was gonna turn me in. I was examining the Japanese knife and then next thing." She nodded to punctuate her point. "I stuck him good. Damn knife wouldn't come out. It was so quick."

Jodie started their way with three mugs.

Maria added in an excited whisper, "It was *exhilarating!*"

Jodie put a mug in front of Maria, then moved around to hand one to Drummond as she uncuffed him. Maria stopped her mug halfway to her lips. Drummond stood and pulled a mini-recorder from his front coat pocket and handed it to Jodie.

"Said she stuck him good. Damn knife couldn't come out and it was exhilarating!"

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Maria dropped her mug and the coffee added to the stains already on the floor.

"You cheated!" Maria shrieked.

"Tell it to the judge."

It was over a glass of sparkling Italian wine, a neat glass of Bolla Spumante, later in Carmen's Bistro just up Royal Street from the scene of the crime that Jodie couldn't stop laughing.

"What?" Drummond asked between sips of Loire Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. He had to ask three times before she got the laughter under control.

"My partner," she said, taking in a deep breath. "Arrested the wrong man. Again."

"I thought you were happy to just be here with me," he said.

She took a sip of Spumante and said, "As Louis told Rick in *Casablanca*, this could be the start of a beautiful relationship."

Drummond gave her that warm, sexy smile again. "Yeah? I just think you enjoy handcuffing me."

THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

by Willie Rose

Each letter consistently represents another. The quotation is from a short mystery story. Arranging the answer letters in alphabetical order gives a clue to the title of the story.

BHT'P SHMMV. F LXRC PIC ZIXJ X ZMXZA HT PIC ICXB SFPI X YHPPNC. NXFB IFD HQP JMHJCMNV. LHB ATHSO SIXP IC SXTPCB PH BH PH PIC AFB.

—LCHMLCO OFDCTHT

CIPHER: _

ANSWER: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Solution on page 100

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BOOKED & PRINTED

ROBERT C. HAHN

The short, unhappy life of Edgar Allan Poe began two hundred years ago on January 19, 1809. It lasted a mere forty years, but his genius spawned the detective story, inspired horror writers, strongly influenced European poets, and affected the course of science fiction.

Poe's legacy is being celebrated on the bicentennial of his birth with two anthologies presented by the Mystery Writers of America, which named its highest honor after him: the Edgar Award. Michael Connelly has edited *In the Shadow of the Master: Classic Tales by Edgar Allan Poe;* Stuart M. Kaminsky has edited *On a Raven's Wing: New Tales in Honor of Edgar Allan Poe,* with twenty original stories. Both MWA volumes include very brief biographical sketches of Poe, but for those seeking more detailed information it would be hard to beat Peter Ackroyd's *(Thames: The Biography)* concise volume, POE: A LIFE CUT SHORT (Doubleday, $21.95).

Ackroyd's assessment provides facts, analysis, and a minimum of speculation. "His fate was heavy, his life all but insupportable," Ackroyd notes, and that conclusion is borne out by the details that emerge from Poe's own letters and from contemporary accounts of him.

Poe's father deserted the family sometime in early 1811, and his mother's death near the end of that year made him an orphan. Edgar Poe was taken into the family of John and Frances (Fanny) Allan and in 1812 was christened Edgar Allan Poe. Indeed, Ackroyd attributes Poe's many unhappy relationships with women to these early tragic beginnings; he writes, "Poe possessed an unerring ability to choose frail, or in some way damaged, women, thus revisiting the experience of his fading mother."

The book also charts Poe's many failed ventures: his brief stint at the University of Virginia, his enlistment in the Army, his subsequent appointment to West Point, and his eventual court martial and expulsion. His peripatetic wanderings took him up and down the Atlantic seacoast—Boston, New York, Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia.

But mostly Ackroyd covers Poe's attempts to write and publish, to secure his place in the literary landscape of the United States. Poe also was a prolific critic and for a time a magazine editor *(Graham's Magazine)*, and his body of work inspired a diverse group of writers such as Charles Baudilaire, Jules Verne, and James Joyce. The many reasons for Poe's failures and limited successes included his volatile temper, his drinking and gambling, and a life seemingly always on the verge of poverty. Ackroyd states, "It has been estimated that the total income from

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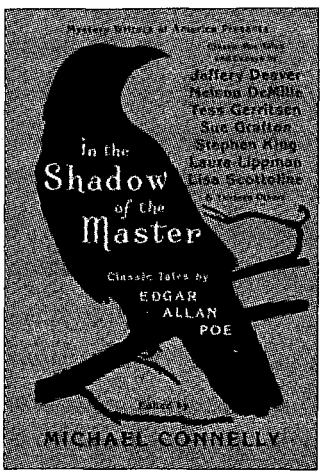
all of his books, over a period of twenty years, was approximately three hundred dollars."

Poe's influence continues to resonate strongly with contemporary authors and Michael Connelly's volume, IN THE SHADOW OF THE MASTER: CLASSIC TALES BY EDGAR ALLAN POE (Morrow, $24.95), drives that home in significant ways. Interspersed between the master's masterpieces, twenty contemporary mystery authors offer essays or appreciations of Poe's genius and influence.



Rereading Poe's best works is a treat and a rediscovery. The addition of commentary by writers such as Stephen King, Jeffrey Deaver, Laura Lippman, Lisa Scottoline, and others make the book a treasure.

All of the essays are worthwhile, from Laurie R. King's indictment of Poe as a "blatant and unscrupulous thief of all the best ideas" to the late master of the short story Edward D. Hoch's conclusion that "For anyone who aspires to write short stories, there is no better teacher than Edgar Allan Poe." Readers will even discover what tales make horrormeister Stephen King afraid and how a reluctant Sue Grafton discovered a Poe tale she admired.

There is humor in some of the essays, as with novelist Jan Burke's refusal to sleep with her door closed after reading "The Cask of Amontillado," Michael Connelly's scare while reading "The Fall of the House of Usher," and Nelson DeMille's terrified journey through a graveyard after seeing the film *Phantom of the Rue Morgue.*

Novelist and Edgar Grand Master (2006) Stuart M. Kaminsky had a different task as editor of ON A RAVEN'S WING: NEW TALES IN HONOR OF EDGAR ALLAN POE (Harper, $14.95); he collected tales that make "Poe himself or his work . . . central to the story." Happily, his accomplished contributors prove worthy of their subject. That is not surprising when you read the roll: Mary Higgins Clark, Thomas H. Cook, James W. Hall, Jeremiah Healy, Edward D. Hoch, Peter Lovesey, and more.

Mary Higgins Clark delivers a delightful send-up called "The Tell-Tale Purr," its inspiration obvious from the title. Thomas H. Cook's "Nevermore" is a moving tale of a dying father's use of Poe's poems to communicate with his estranged son. Brendan DuBois effectively updates one of Poe's classics in "The Cask of Castle Island." Edward D. Hoch's mastery of the short story is amply demonstrated in "The Poe Collector," as he combines knowledge of Poe's life and work with the zeal and greed of modern collectors to produce a clever puzzler.

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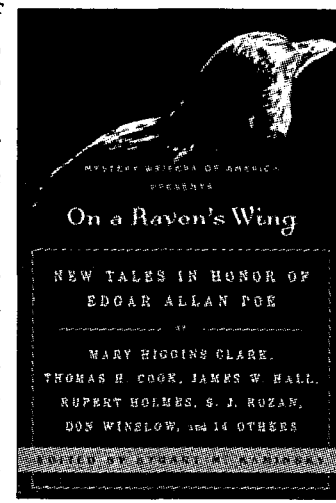
Poe has been both used and abused by the movie industry but Paul Levine's hilarious "Development Hell" imagines a bemused Edgar Allan Poe dealing directly with an executive of Diablo Pictures who envisions a franchise ("sequels, prequels, spinoffs") from "The Pit and the Pendulum," with merchandizing riches and more. Of course, there would have to be changes. Who knows how Poe would have responded to such possibilities in his lifetime?


On a Raven's Wing
NEW TALES IN HONOR OF
EDGAR ALLAN POE
MARY HIGGINS CLARK,
THOMAS H. COOK, JAMES W. HALL,
RUPERT HOLMES, S. J. ROZAN,
DON WINSLOW, and 14 OTHERS

Peter Lovesey mines more Poe history for "The Deadliest Tale of All" in which the unfortunate author endures one last misfortune, while John Lutz's "Poe, Poe, Poe" cleverly weaves many Poe titles and characters into a story that features Poe as its main character.

ALL POINTS BULLETIN: MWA has chosen The Edgar Allan Poe Society and The Poe House as the recipients of the 2009 Raven Award to be given at the Edgar Awards Banquet. • In addition to the volumes honoring Poe's impact on the mystery genre, it is worth noting that homage to his influence is also paid in *Poe's Children: The New Horror* (Doubleday, $26.95) an anthology edited by Peter Straub. Straub's assembled a stellar list of twenty-five authors including Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll, Stephen King, Neil Gaiman and Thomas Tessier. Random House Audio has produced an abridged version of this volume on 12 CDs (15.5 hours) for $49.95.

From the severe aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to the deadly miscalculations of a CIA operative, contemporary themes mark the fine, haunting selections of THE BEST AMERICAN MYSTERY STORIES 2008 (Houghton Mifflin, $14). Editor George Pelecanos *(The Turnaround)* has curated an addicting blend of evocative, timely modern mysteries. Giants like James Lee Burke and Joyce Carol Oates are placed next to talented newcomers, notably young writers Kyle Minor and Holly Goddard Jones. Minor takes readers through the powerful psychological journey of an elderly woman haunted by a horrific crime in her past in "A Day Meant to Do Less," while Jones brilliantly parses the plight of a young loner burdened with terrible secrets in "Proof of God." Leo "Skig" Skorzeny, a sympathetic, brutal loan shark familiar to these pages, has a memorable turn in Jas. R. Petrin's "Car Trouble" as an advocate for an elderly friend at a sleazy car dealership. Whether the crimes are on a domestic or international scale, they make for masterful turns of plot and character in this anthology. —*Laurel Fantauzzo*

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MANHUNT

FRANK T. WYDRA

The one named Bracer rammed a leather-jacketed forearm into Johnny Doogle's teeth, busting a lip and bouncing his head off the brick. Bracer's partner, Cooley, kept an eye on the street, as if watching for witnesses. The flasher was on the dash, but turned off, like they knew the thing always drew a crowd.

Bracer, arm now pinning Johnny's throat, fished a hand to an inside pocket and pulled out a black-and-white photo. "Gimmie a light here," he ordered Cooley, then growled into Johnny's face, "Ever see her? She one of yours?"

Johnny, eyes blinking, turned his head away from the sudden bright, showing the golf ball–sized white birthmark on his cheek. Snowball the locals called him, a name the cops didn't know. Bracer helped him focus by giving his head another bounce. "You hearing? She one of yours?"

The picture was of the face a white girl, blonde, good looking, about sixteen.

Johnny Doogle peddled crack, and this storefront, where Bracer was bouncing his head, was in the middle of his territory. Little after midnight, not much chance anyone but dedicated customers would pass by, and no chance at all they'd stop with a cruiser sitting one wheel on the curb where he was having this informal chat with the cops. Bacon. They might pulp him, but that was the worst of it. Went with the job. Something he'd come to expect.

Bracer and Cooley did the graveyard, Central District. He knew them, they knew him. Like family. Only this family, Papa was a pit bull.

The girl in the picture, the blonde kid, he knew her too. Customer. Smart mouth. Plenty of money. Came around about, say, once a week. Always good for a fifty dollar bag of something: amps, hash, bennies, M&Ms, starter stuff, mainly. He'd tried to move her up to crack or cane a couple of times, but she nixed the gig. Scared little rich kid. Now the only reason Bracer was pushing a photo of her in his face is she'd come to no good. Dead, probably. From shit. Someone else's. But, Johnny thinking, if he opens his mouth and says, "Yeah, I seen her," they'd be over him. Next thing, he's downtown shoulder to shoulder with four other dudes and someone behind the glass is fingering him. No way. So he shakes his 'fro

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and says, "Don't know her, man. So let loose." But Bracer, not acting convinced, does another rep with the arm, bouncing Johnny's head, saying, "Look again."

His eyes go to the photo, and he says, "You think I don't know my people? Something like that comes round, I'm gonna forget? So lay off, man. Can't breathe."

Bracer gives the arm another push, cutting off the words, then lets loose.

"Listen, punk—" He pushed the kid's picture in Johnny's face. "—this is for you. Make the rounds. Anybody knows her, you tell me, I go easy for a month. You getting this? Easy for a month." Bracer, stuffing the picture in his shirt, slinging him to the ground, getting in the car with Cooley, leaving him there in the dark on the crumbling cement.

Johnny thinking, they want someone bad. Want someone that bad, don't care who it is. Just someone. And a dozen people know he's peddling to her. One of them, they gonna say, "Snowball." Then they're back on him. Next time for real.

Johnny pushed himself to his feet and brushed off the dirt. He felt a tear in the elbow of his Snoop Dogg leather jacket. Three hundred seventy, the thing cost. Bacon, there, rips it, the way he pushed him. He felt the inside pocket of the jacket where he kept the stuff. Hadn't searched him. Left him his stash. Maybe twelve bills worth. What was that, a signal? Bacon telling him, give them a name, he's safe?

Johnny thought about names he could drop on them. Dealers. But, man, start that and it's war. He outs some dude, dude's friends come back on him. Not worth the hassle for a month's peace. Johnny pulled out the photo and tried to look at it, but with the streetlights all shot out, it was too dark. He almost balled it up to throw away, then thought better of it and put it in his pocket. Might as well go home, way bacon was cruising there was no business to be had anyway.

Every once in a while he passed a few bros sitting on stoops, flapping gums. Ones he knew, he took a minute with. Bonding. But what he really wanted was to get his hands on the *Free Press*, see what the hassle was about. Party store on Cass run by a sand jockey was closed. No cars in the dirt lot. Fifty-gallon drum still smoldering from the day's burn. A red *Free Press* coin box outside the store still had a paper in it, but Johnny had nothing but bills in his jeans. He kicked the box and pulled at the lid. Tighter than some dead dude's fist.

Doing a three sixty, checking the 'hood, looking for eyes. So far as he could see, no one was peeking from behind blinds. No one was lurking. He bent, hefted a brick, moved to the steel box, and gave it a Joe Louis. Nothing. Changing the angle, this time to catch the lip of the lid, three quick whacks, and the front popped. Two folded papers sitting there. Reaching in, he grabbed one, left the brick to weigh down the other, and walked away. Not enough light to read, even if he wanted to stand on the street waiting for noses to peek at the noise.

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Once in his dig, he put the paper on the kitchen table and started looking for headlines. Page three. Dead blonde kid. Same picture and a long story saying how they'd wheeled her into Beaumont's E.R. White man's hospital down the road from ritzy Birmingham. She'd OD'd on Fentanyl. That stopped Johnny. Little percopos? Analgesic lollipops? Not something anyone OD'd on. He read the article through to the end. Two other kids dead, same cause, in the last three months. He could feel the heat. Three dead kids in money-land, soccer moms bleating like sheep, find the sucker selling to the little princesses. Pissed him off, way these honkies stole headlines. Any month, ten black kids catch lunch, not one of them making the *Free Press.*

He leaned back in his chair, looking around the dig. Clean. No dishes in the sink. Two wooden chairs. Metal table. Paint worn off the cabinets where the scrubbing had got to it. TV, leather sofa, easy chair, and a small bookcase through the doorway. King-sized bed in the adjoining ten-by-twelve room. Showed the style you could have selling drugs. More money in working the assembly line, if anyone was offering the work. And no bacon bouncin' his head on the brick.

Johnny sighed and looked at the headline again. Whoever was selling to the blondies was going to kill his business. Maybe him along with it.

It was five fifteen A.M. when Cooley pulled the unmarked car into the precinct lot. Bracer with his usual energy was out of the car and moving to the door before Cooley had his open. After thirty in the weight room and a shower, they sat in the locker room, switching to streets.

Cooley said, "Thing I don't get is why you're so hot on this case. Not like we don't have enough of our stuff to follow."

Bracer, five-ten, had the solid build of a wrestler and walnut skin, flat nose, and skin around the corners of his eyes eroded by all he'd seen. "Y'know," he said, as if it were an explanation. Not that Cooley needed the story. Bracer, twelve years out of the academy, last three as undercover street, had an obsession: He wanted to get out of the city and move to Birmingham. Birmingham, with its one murder every twenty years. Biggest crime being rowdy teens after Seaholm High won a game. Place where schools actually taught kids to read and write and do the math. He wanted to get his five year old into those schools, have her mix with the right kids, kids who expected to go to college. He hoped to get a job on the Birmingham PD. To do that, though, he'd have to jump the other hundred wannabees. By the time that happened, LuAnne would be a high school grad who could read at the third-grade level.

"Trouble with you," Bracer said, "is you got no kids."

Cooley rolled his eyes. "This what it's all about? You getting that honky job? Ain't going to happen, so let it go, man, we got enough to do."

Bracer, tying his laces, gave Cooley a look. "Don't give me that crap,

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man. You know how it is." When he'd gotten the word on the Brandon girl being carried into Beaumont, then dying before she came around, he knew she had gotten her stuff on his street. In that moment he saw a way. Nail the dealer who put the blonde teen on the slab and it would vault him to the top of that waiting list. "Chance like this, don't happen that often."

Cooley leaned his face into Bracer's, pointing a finger to his own temple. "You got a thing up here. Don't mean it's happening on the street."

"These people are slime," Bracer said, playing one of his favorite themes. If there had ever been an empathy between him and the inner city street-life, it had been rubbed raw by years of contact. "You with me on this, or what?"

Cooley straightened, shaking his head and screwing his face into a disgusted look. "Aw, man. Don't put it that way. Let's just have a beer and forget about this white broad. None of our business."

Bracer, shoulder muscles flexing, face hinting at a snarl. "I'm asking. You with me or not?"

"Bracer . . . y'know I'm with you, but man, what are the odds?"

Even without doing the math, Bracer knew the edge was slim. Their beat was the Cass Corridor, a strip just west of Woodward, Detroit's main drag, running from the Fisher Freeway to Warren, the southern border of Wayne State University. Though boasting some of Detroit's iconic structures, it was also a no-man's-land of burnt-out buildings, vacant lots, easy houses that gave citizens what they wanted at prices anyone could afford, respectable old apartments, and newly built condos. Iron bars over first floor windows was a standard part of the décor. Not as obvious were the pushers working the alcoves. The bosses had divided the Corridor into about a dozen territories, giving a franchise to each of the dealers in return for a percentage of the take. More dope peddled in this little strip than on the dirt streets of Marrakesh. The most lucrative sites were those on the north, closest to the university, where the student population was heaviest. Add cream to the cake, rich boys from the other side of Eight Mile had taken to cruising the campus looking for buys. Being smart, those willing to run the risk, also found that by meandering a few blocks south they could save a few bucks on the stuff. Pick your danger, pick your place, pick your price. So the way Bracer saw it, chances were, girl from the suburbs wants to make a buy, she would shop the Corridor. Odds of finding the pusher who sold it to her were next to nil. People in the Corridor had little use for police, regardless of their skin color. What justice there was got dispensed by the gangs, groups of dropouts who wore Po-boy pants, triple-X tees, two-hundred-dollar Nikes, and thirty-eight specials. But, like the man said, don't look, don't find.

"Fuck the odds," Bracer said.

High noon and Johnny was on the street. There was a place on Third where the bosses huddled, place he almost never went. Bosses were trouble.

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They gave. They took away. Didn't need no reason. But he wanted to check, see if any of them could peg the dead blonde with another dealer. You got trouble like he had, some things you got to do.

His neck hurt from the way bacon had rammed him. And the jacket, didn't know if it could be sewed up. Even then, close-up, it wouldn't look new. He kept his hands in his pockets as he walked, doing a stare-down at any dudes gave him the eye, letting them know he could handle it. Not sure if he could, neck and all.

Place he was looking for was a cinder block one-story, vacant lots on either side. One side had been a parking lot back in the eighties when the place was still doing business. Now, weeds pushed through the asphalt. Other side, just dirt from where a house used to be. Although the front door was stout steel with a fogged-glass, eight-inch square of a window, it was hasp locked. A plywood door in the alley served as the main entry. He kicked the bottom of the plywood three times and waited. A slider in the door opened enough for an eye to do him.

"Yeah," a voice said.

"See the man," he said.

"Says who?"

"Johnny D."

The slider slammed and about a minute dragged until the door inched open. Although there were lights on in the room—electricity pirated from a place across the alley—it took a while for Johnny's eyes to adjust. There were about a half dozen bros in the room, most sitting on easy chairs or plush sofas. Johnny's main contact, Bad Man Duff, was not among the loungers. He didn't know if that was good or bad. Nobody was playing pool at the big table in the center of the room. Nobody playing games at the electro-boxes against the wall. Nobody turning down the blaster thumping hip-hop at a hundred decibels. Johnny felt the rhythm and involuntarily pimp-stepped to the beat as he approached a man dressed in comic book clothes and gold chains.

"Hey, Mr. Quick," he said, offering his hand palm up for the boss of bosses to five.

Quick declined the slap and gave a little jerk of his head. In the middle of a beat the sound level dropped in half. "What yo want?"

Johnny gave an awkward smile. He'd never asked the man for a favor before and wasn't sure how it should be done so he just came out with it. "Some help, that's all."

"What this look like, Kelly Services?" Snickers around the room.

Johnny pulled out the picture of the dead girl from his pocket and offered it to Quick. With another head move, Quick ordered the bruiser next to Johnny to snatch the picture, then hand it to him. Johnny said, "This white kid got some bad shit and burned. Hauled her into that white hospital, Beaumont. Now the bacon looking for whoever sold to her."

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Quick showed a mouth of ivory. "And you the one that peddled." Not a question.

Johnny shook his head. "One of mine, but I ain't seen her in a month. 'Sides, she dosed on Little percopos, not stuff I do."

Quick's eyes became slits as if trying to figure the scam. "So, yo clean, but the oinkers, they on your case?"

Johnny nodded. "I need to find who's peddling this shit."

Quick's mouth became as grim as his eyes. "Then what? You goin' to rap the dude?"

Johnny didn't even have to think about it. Give any word to the police about anything and he might as well dig his grave. He made a face saying, you got it wrong and said, "No way."

"Then what?"

"Way I figure, I find this dude, he winds up somewhere in the Corridor, carrying the stuff, bacon does the math, calls the dogs."

Quick tilted his head back. "How much you handle in a normal week?"

Johnny knew none of the dealers in the Corridor handled much, and he had no illusions of his status. "Good week, maybe two K." Which netted him about eight hundred. He figured Quick's cut to be about another six.

Quick said, "Ain't worth pissin' on. 'Sides, ain't no Fentanyl out there." Which meant that Quick, who was the wholesaler for this part of the Corridor, was not supplying the stuff. Also meant, the stuff was not coming through the organization. Code of the street was, get caught peddling bootleg stuff, get stuffed in a fifty-gallon drum. Not that it didn't happen. Just don't get caught.

Johnny nodded. Message was, no help here. He said, "Yeah, well, thanks."

Quick said, "Come 'round again, bring cash. Otherwise . . . Now, get outta here."

Way out, Johnny tried to catch the eye of any of the loungers, figuring one of them might have a clue. All he caught were snickers and leers.

The sun outside the building made him squint. Maybe it was good that Bad Man Duff wasn't there. Gave him a separate crack at the supplier. He pulled his cell and tried Bad Man's number. Most times all he got was a call-back message. This time, though, Bad Man answered, "Yeah?"

"We talk?"

"You need stuff?"

Though he didn't, Johnny knew no chance Bad Man would take the time unless there was cash in it. "Yeah," he said. "Tom Boy's in fifteen."

Tom Boy's was a little supermarket on Second and Alexandrine. About the only place in the Corridor people could mingle without being in the open. Johnny cut across some lots and waited until he saw Bad Man pull up and enter the store. Man was salivating over back ribs in the meat case as Johnny got next to him.

Without looking up to see who was pushing his flank, Bad Man said, "How much you need?"

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"Small load," he said, low-fiving a C-spot into Bad Man's palm. "Any chance you got some Fentanyl."

Bad Man gave him a sideways look. "What you talking? Lollipops?"

"Uh-uh. Raw."

Bad Man now squinting, still with the sideways look. "That stuff costs." What he was saying, Where you getting customers got that kind of cash?

"Don't need much."

"Hey man, this ain't Macy's. I buy, I got to buy big. You take a nibble from that bag, where I place the rest? You getting this?"

"How much I got to take for you to get it?"

Bad Man looked around to see if anyone was in earshot, like maybe it was a setup. Then he turned and walked, all three hundred of him. Johnny following, catching him in the dog food aisle. "You didn't give me my stuff, man," asking for the hundred's worth he'd paid for.

Bad Man on him, fierce. "You setting me up?"

"What setup? Just trying to know if you can get the shit, that's all. What you saying is you can put your hands on it."

Bad Man doing the squinty-eyed thing. "Yeah. I can get it. Get anything for a price. But this shit, it's cash up front."

Johnny saying, "Talked to Quick. He says he don't peddle. Means you're going outside. Stuff you're peddling is contraband. Means, he finds out, your ass."

Man his size, it surprised Johnny he could move that fast, arm shooting out like a snake's tongue. Johnny felt himself coming off the floor, toes just tapping the tile, Bad Man's fist holding his jacket under his chin. "What you saying?"

"Saying, I need to know who's peddling this shit."

"And why you need to know this, which ain't none of your business?" Bad Man eased his arm and Johnny felt his heels touch earth.

Johnny tried to push Bad Man's hand away, but the grip held. "This white kid dosed on the stuff. Bacon's on my case."

Bad Man's grip tightened and his arm flexed, lifting Johnny an inch. "I hear you saying you working for the pigs?"

Johnny's head shook. "No, no. Nothing like that. Looking for this guy myself. Save my ass."

"By rousting him?"

Another shake. "By frying his ass, and letting bacon know he's the one. Like by leaving clues. Incriminating evidence. Gets them off me."

Johnny felt his heels touch and the grip on his jacket loosen. "And you expect me to tell you who's peddlin' this stuff?"

"Figuring since I'm your man, least you could do."

Bad Man let loose of Johnny's jacket.

"Man's out there. I'm goin' to find him. You help, I pile on an extra ten percent, next six months." Johnny eyed him, figuring if anything can move that mountain, it'd be extra cash. "He soul?"

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Bad Man's brows came together and his lips puckered, but almost involuntarily, his head moved, side to side. "Twenty."

"Hey, man, I gotta live. Fifteen. Anyway, this man's not soul, what's he to you? Just meat, not like a bro." Now the squint-eyed, tilt-head look again, as if Bad Man's looking for the angle, figuring how he can get burned, figuring how he can get the fifteen without giving up anything. Johnny says, "Don't shit me."

Bad Man says, "There's this guy, works Wayne State."

Bracer pulled rap sheets on the twenty-three Cass Corridor pushers he and Cooley had street interviewed. Although the kid could have bought from any of them, Bracer had this sense that allowed him to zero in on the most likely. Not that he was always right, but it gave him a place to start. A large part of the zero was the way the perps reacted in the chat. He wrote off the shakers, those who quaked when he muscled them, as being too scared to lie. He also crossed the mouths, anyone with a history of cooperating with the police. They knew, they'd talk. None had. Most pushers became immune to the shakes after a half dozen or so alley chats, so the ones left were hard cases. Those left, about ten, were lucky enough to have made his bonus round. These he would give a second interview. Before that, though, he needed to talk to some kids who knew the dead girl, people who might have been with her at the buy. Problem was, if he was right, nothing but the buy happened in his jurisdiction, and that was an open question. Girl OD'd outside the city. Even if the locals called for city help, it would be the narc squad or homicide, not some street cruiser, like him.

"Hey, Cool," he said to his partner sitting across from him.

Cooley looked up, questioning.

"You know anybody in Narc?"

Cooley shook his head as if thinking, When would it end? He said, "Guy by the name of Dobczak, Fedor Dobczak."

"How about making a call for me?"

Word moved fast once the second interviews started. Guy Johnny knew sent him a text, three others voiced. Word was, heat's on for any perp who sold Magic to young white meat. It immediately dried up the market for everything else since no one wanted to risk a spot in the lineup.

Bad Man hadn't given him a name, but something almost as good, the phone number the guy used for contact. What Johnny knew about computers he could fit in the business end of a syringe. But he had this customer who worked over at Wayne State who did computers, guy went by the name of Casper the Ghost. Dumbshit name.

Johnny caught Casper coming out of a place called The Bronx, a steel-doored bar done up in fake sandstone. Though the Ghost was with three

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other dudes, Johnny cut him out of the herd with a juke of his head.

Trailing five yards behind his buds Casper said, "Hey man, what's up?"

"Want to earn a little?" Casper snorted coke, mainly bought C-bags when he had the green. Not a big spender, but steady.

"What you need?"

"Got this phone number needs looking up."

"You talking cell? Cells are hard."

"Don't know what I'm talking. Just got this number and need the name and street that goes with it."

"I dunno, man, cells are hard."

Even though he didn't know much about computers, Johnny figured they could do almost anything with the right guy pushing the buttons. To him it sounded like the ghost was negotiating. "You sayin' you can't do it?"

Casper backed off a little, pushing air with his hands. "No, no. Not saying that. Sayin' it's hard. Maybe worth more than a C-bag."

Always about the money. "What we talkin'?"

Casper shuffled, looking up, looking down, looking sideways, looking everywhere but in Johnny's eyes. "Say five bags."

Johnny snorted, knowing he had a deal. "Three."

"No guarantees. You give me a number from one of them K-Mart throwaways, no way I can get that."

"Three when you gimme a name and address, else nothing."

"Aw, man, cells are hard. I gotta get something outta this."

Johnny had worked the street for too long to pay for air. He handed the number Bad Man had given him to Casper. "Name and address, else nothin'."

Casper took the slip of paper, looked at it, said, "I jus' know this gonna be a throwaway."

Bracer caught up with Missy Conlan at a Mickey D's on Southfield in Beverly Hills, a bedroom community south of Birmingham.

Like the Brandon girl, she was blonde, fit, and sixteen going on thirty. Dobczak had given Cooley phones and photo IDs on four of the vic's closest. Two had panned, denying any knowledge of inner city trips or drug buys. Driven snow. He's expected no more from this one, but no way to tell unless he asked the questions. Given her age, protocol called for him to first contact her parents or the school before talking with her, but at the moment he wasn't too interested in the rules. Any of the kids' parents complain, lieutenant would hammer him. But no pain, no gain.

She came away from the counter with a salad and coke, heading for the door with three other chattering magpies when he stepped in her way, showing her his wallet badge, saying, "Missy Conlan?"

Four pairs of teenaged Bambi eyes saucered. Bracer, who was in civvies, smiled at the gaggle and said, "Not to worry. Just a routine followup on the girl who died last month." Gesturing toward a table by the window, he said, "We can sit over here so your friends can watch from the outside."

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Missy gave the others a pained smile, as if her parents had just grounded her, then moved to the table, saying, "You really a cop?"

Bracer figured even without the uniform he looked like a cop, and he had showed her the badge, so why the question? "Yeah," he said. "Want to see my badge again?"

She flashed him a self-confident smile, the kind of self-confidence he wanted LuAnne to have someday. "No, that's all right. I just didn't, y'know, see a police car in the lot."

He nodded. "Plainclothes cops use regular cars." In fact, it was his day off. Had he used a marked car, the Beverly Hills PD would have spotted it and his charade would have been over. He pulled a picture of the Brandon girl from a manila folder. "She was a friend of yours, right?" The shot had been taken on the hospital gurney and showed neither life nor charm. It was the kind of picture that could turn stomachs.

Missy looked at it, as if seeing her friend for the first time. Perhaps she was.

The girl nodded, bead of a tear welling in one eye.

"You ever go into the city with her?"

A scared look on her face told him she had. Before she could deny the question, Bracer said. "Look, I'm trying to find the guy who sold her the stuff that killed her. What you say is between us. Doesn't go in my book. Doesn't go to your folks. Just stays here between us. So, help me out here."

Her eyes went down, and she bit her lower lip. Truth teetered on its edge. Slowly, her chin bobbed.

"You ever with her when she bought stuff?"

Again, the startled deer look. The look told him she'd made the trip.

Pulling a sheaf of mug-shots out of the folder, he said, "Look at these. Tell me if you recognize any of them."

One by one she studied the pictures of the Cass Corridor dealers, turning each over as she finished with it. Then she stopped, looked up at Bracer, and handed him the picture. It was Johnny Doogle, the pusher with the white birthmark on his cheek.

"Lucky it wasn't one of them throwaways," Casper said, handing Johnny a printout. "Cell, though. Hard enough."

Johnny took the page, looked at it, read the name: Evan Williger. Lived in Birmingham, same as the dead girl. "How do I know this is real?"

Casper's eyes rolled. "What you think? Call the sucker, check it out. Do whatever you're going to do with it, but, man, that's genuine."

Johnny supposed it was, but once he handed over the booty, no way of getting it back short of muscle. He fished a single baggie out of his jacket pocket and handed it over. "Get the rest once I check this."

Stuffing the baggie in his inside jacket pocket, sneer on his face, Casper said, "That the way it is, kiss off the other shit."

It took a second for Johnny to decipher the message. "What you talkin'? What other shit?"

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Casper waved him off and began to turn around. "Way you pay, I'll just keep the other stuff till I get my price."

They were on the Wayne State campus, plenty of people around. That didn't stop Johnny from grabbing Casper's shoulder, spinning him around, fisting his jacket, and pushing him back until he was against the bricks of the Old Main building. The only reaction of the pedestrians was to give extra distance as they passed. Casper, thirty pounds light on Johnny, went for the hands, but he couldn't break the grip. Johnny gave him a shake. "What you got?"

Casper worked on Johnny's clutch with both hands, one foot trying a shin kick, saying, "Leggo. Anyway, pay up what you owe. Then what I got cost you an extra two bags."

Johnny thumped Casper against the wall, making his head kiss the brick, moving in so the little man's kicks had no force, bringing a threatening knee near the jewels. "What you got?"

Casper's eyes were doing their everywhere but straight on thing. Finally, barely audible, he said, "I got more stuff."

Double handing Casper's jacket, another bounce on the wall, then getting his head down low enough so he could see the man's face. "What?"

Casper yelled, "I got more stuff on that guy. Looked him up on the Net."

Computer guys, anything they got, they printed. Letting go of the jacket with one hand, Johnny reached inside Casper's coat, feeling for the papers. His hand came out with a folded sheaf.

Casper said, "All you paid for was name and address."

"Work you did, paid too much."

Using the forearm of his clutching hand and a side body press, he kept Casper pinned to the wall while he opened the sheaf with his other hand. First page, there was a man's picture. White guy, young, maybe thirty-something, dark hair cut in one of those flat-tops, face clean, like he'd never taken a punch. Beside the picture was a column of words with the caption, Evan P. Williger. The rest of the words were too small to read with Casper squirming. Taking a step back, he straightened his arm, gave Casper another bounce, saying, "Don' ever hold out on me again," then released his grip.

Johnny dialed Harper Hospital and asked for Evan Williger in the chemistry department. When someone answered, "Chemistry," he asked for the name again.

"Is this a personal call?" the voice asked.

It threw Johnny for a second, then he figured it. "Naw, this here's business."

There was a long wait before a man's voice said, "Hello."

"This here Evan Williger?"

"This is he."

"We need to talk," Johnny said.

"Who is this?"

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"Some guy knows you're selling shit on the street that gets people killed."

Could have watched a football game, pause was that long. "I don't know what you're talking about. Who is this?" The last said with some force, guy trying to act tough.

"Find that out when we meet. Or you rather I just give this to the bacon?"

"Bacon?"

"You know man, the pigs, the cops. You don' wanna talk with me, I jus' give them what I got."

Another football game. Then, voice very low now, guy trying to whisper, "I'm working. I can't meet till later. My shift ends at eleven."

Johnny looked at his Rolex: four fifteen. "No problem, man, eleven thirty, outside Traffic Jam and Snug." His working hours, anyway.

Traffic Jam and Snug was one of those little upscale eateries that exist on the fringes of urban campuses. This one's specialty was homemade bread and an on-site micro brewery. Johnny had done the place once, after a big score, but he thought the beer bitter and the bread brown and full of things he couldn't identify. He'd finally asked for a Bud and some plain white bread to go with the well-done steak and fries he'd ordered. Except for the oak door, the outside of Snug was all brick, with a communal urinal serving as a flower pot on one wall.

Johnny, standing under the porcelain trough, checked his watch. Eleven thirty-two. Man was late.

A car drove into the self-park lot across the street. A moment later a man no taller than Johnny but with a slight build walked through the break in the chain-link fence. There was not enough light to make out his features, but from the way he looked around, Johnny guessed it was Williger. Crossing the street, the man slowed as he approached Johnny who stood in the shadow of the urinal. He could make out the white boy's face now and said, "Williger?"

The man, as if finally noticing him, changed direction, saying, "Yes." His voice sounded strained. Guy was scared. So much the better.

While most of Cass Corridor was shrouded in the black of shot-out streetlamps, the area around Snug was brightly lit. Not where Johnny wanted to be. Before Williger reached him, he moved out of the shadow, took up a streetside position next to the chemist and, heading toward the dark of Third Street, said, "C'mon."

No argument. The man was his.

Once they escaped the penumbra of light, Johnny said, ""What you doing sellin' shit in my territory?" Johnny had no idea of whether Williger sold in the meager territory allotted to him by the Brothers, but he saw that as a technicality. So far as Williger knew, any part of the Corridor was his territory.

Williger mumbled something.

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Johnny stopped, spun the man toward him so they were facing. "I aksed you a question."

Williger, head apologetically down, shaking from side to side, said, "Hey, I didn't know. So I'm sorry. Okay? I'm sorry."

"You mix F with Horse, what you think goin' to happen?"

Williger shrugged, wagged his head, still not looking up. "People said they wanted Magic. Thought they knew enough to be careful."

Johnny pushed him on the shoulder. "Walk," he ordered, again moving toward Third. Lot of dark places on Third.

"Where we going?" Williger asked.

"None o' your business." Johnny fingering the thirty-eight in the small of his back. "You think some sixteen-year-old white kid know enough?"

Williger stopped, facing Johnny now, at least looking him in the eye. "You can't tell anymore how old they are, the way they make themselves up. They might be twelve or twenty-five. You just can't tell." Another shrug and shake of his head. "And I really needed the money."

Yeah, Johnny thought, we all need the green. Kid comes to him wanting Magic, he had it, he'd sell. "What you need money for that bad, you need to sell in my land?"

Williger's hands came out and Johnny almost reached for the piece, but he saw the man's hands up, just gesturing, and he stayed cool. "I got this aunt who helped raise me. She has no insurance. She needs help. Medical help. I needed the money."

"Yeah, right. You some kind of Robbing Hood, takes from the rich, gives to the poor?"

Williger shook his head again, "No, I just needed money, take care of her." Then, looking Johnny in the eye, saying, "Look, I'm sorry. I didn't know there were these territories. I didn't mean anything. I won't do it anymore. Okay?" Whine to his voice. Scared witless.

Johnny pushing him on the shoulder, again getting him walking, saying, "Don' matter you sorry. Thing is, you sell this shit, bacon come down on my back, thinkin' it's me that's sellin'. They were at Third, no one on the street, either direction, Johnny forcing a turn toward some vacant lots next to concrete block buildings.

Williger beginning to figure what's going down, saying, "Hey man, what do I got to do to square with you? If it's money, just say so. I can get you this stuff. You can sell it."

Johnny snorted. Man's still not getting it. All the shit in the world, not going to get bacon off his back. "How 'bout you confess to the police? Tell them you the one sellin' that shit to the little white girls."

Again Williger stopped, looked at Johnny. "I can't do that. They'd charge me with murder."

"Yeah, well?"

"No, no. You don't understand. They charge me, there's no way I can get you stuff. No way to square with you."

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"An' no way you can take care of that aunt of yours."

Smiling, Williger nodded. "Yeah, that's it. Look, I can make lots of this stuff. You'll be rich."

They were next to a concrete block building that once housed the most notorious dive in the Corridor. It had been a place where for a dollar a Devil could buy a soul. Now, though the place was painted white and the neon had been torn from the façade, it still had the look and smell of the hell it had once been. Johnny said, "Rich?" Nudging Williger toward the empty lot next to the dive. "How rich we talkin'?"

Williger said, "Rich. I can make this stuff all day."

"You got any, this stuff on you now?"

Even in the shadow of the building and the darkness of the night, he could see Williger's eyes brighten. "Yeah, yeah." He reached into his pocket, but before he could get his hand out, Johnny's thirty-eight was on him.

"Slow," Johnny said, and Williger's hand came out holding a packet of white powder.

It made Johnny smile. He'd figured he'd have to stuff a few of his baggies in the guy's pocket. Man made it easy, saving him trouble. "You got more?"

"Three more."

Only needed one for bacon to find.

The problem Bracer had was he wanted to search Johnny Doogle's pad, but he had no way to get a warrant without giving up that this was extracurricular work. And he very much wanted to see what the pusher had in his apartment before collaring him. The girl, Missy Conlan, had told him she'd made Cass Corridor with the dead girl, Brandon, twice. Both times Brandon had made contact with Johnny Doogle, though Missy insisted she'd just been there for the ride and never touched any of the stuff Brandon bought. The last time they'd made the trek was six weeks ago and Missy had not seen Brandon in the two weeks before her death. Lucky. Otherwise, she might now be sleeping on a slab too.

Good as the information was, using it was tricky, since he was a renegade on this case. He figured once he pegged Doogle, he could get the investigating officer to open Missy up again, but it was a good chance he'd contaminated her as a witness.

He called Cooley, asked him if he wanted to take a ride before their shift started. Cooley didn't but went-along anyway.

"You know you're queering the case," was the first thing Cooley said.

Bracer knew he was, but he kept seeing LuAnne, sitting in that McDonald's eating fries with the white kids, talking suburban, getting an education at the school down the street, escaping the stigmata ghetto-Detroit left on the tongue, the brain, the attitude. And what would it take? Bring just one of the animals to heal? No, that was wrong. Animals were

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incapable of improving themselves. These city hoods threw away their future. They were worse than animals. They were slime, slush, and shit that poisoned and contaminated everything around them.

"She's already six," Bracer said. "Don't move now, it'll be too late."

"You could always quit, take a job at Wal-Mart and move up there. Make more sense than this stuff you're trying to pull."

Not the first time Cooley had brought it up. Man didn't understand. "I'm a cop, not some glad-handing greeter. Besides, takes money to live in that neighborhood, not some nickel and dime job." His face got hard. "Look, don't rag me on this. You want out, say so, I'll do it myself."

"You're being stupid, but we're partners." As if that covered it all. And it did.

They had two hours before the start of their shift. Bracer aimed his personal car toward the Corridor. "Going to see if he's home."

"If he is?"

"Routine follow-up on one of the cold ones." Since Johnny Doogle had some priors, he was fair game when it came to talking to the usual suspects.

"And if he's not home?"

"We'll see."

Turned out, Johnny was not. After three sets of knocks and the appropriate wait, Bracer tried the door. Locked, as expected. The four-story apartment building in which Johnny lived was old, built during the twenties when they still believed in real wood and plaster lath walls. They might be able to bust the door, but half the neighbors would be watching them before they finished. Nice thing about old apartments, though, was they usually had fire escapes. "Stay here," Bracer said and headed back down. Within five, hands in plastic gloves, he'd snared the steel rung of the escape and was up the creaky metal steps to the third floor and Johnny's pad. The window was painted shut, but an elbow through the glass and a little shard-clearing had him inside. Piece out, hanging at his side, he walked the rooms confirming their emptiness. Last thing he did was spring the bolt to let Cooley in.

"What we looking for?"

"His stash. Need to see if he's into Fentanyl."

"Few minutes ago you were pretty sure."

"Still sure, just need the proof. I'll start here, you take the kitchen. No need to be neat."

Cooley was the one found the stash, thirty odd bags of coke, MJ, 'ludes, and bennies. None of them had the look and feel of the killer drug. "What now?" Cooley asked.

"Finish tossing the place."

It took another half hour but netted no new dope. Pocketing a packet of coke, Bracer said, "Stash the rest where you found it."

Cooley raised an eyebrow. Bracer said, "It's in here. Once we collar that

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shit, this'll get us the warrant, give the pros a crack at finding it."

Bracer's plan was to run Johnny Doogle to ground as soon as the shift started, but life got in the way. A pimp, his woman working Woodward, started hammering his true love on the corner of Alexandrine. By the time they got there, half the crowd was laying money on the pimp, the other half on the hooker. Given the pimp's broken nose and bleeding eye, Bracer called the contest for the hooker.

By midnight they were finally cruising the Corridor, looking for their boy. Up Second, down Third, making all the cross streets, Bracer rode shotgun, eyeing the alcoves and empty lots. The ink night made seeing difficult, but the spot telegraphed the prowl. Twice he flashed it on: one time catching a couple humping and the other time a lone traveler cutting across a lot. Had it not been for the black jacket against the peeling whitewashed cement block, Bracer would have missed them. Squinting, he said, "What's that?"

Cooley eased the gas. "Two of 'em."

Bracer lit the spot. Two figures. One against the wall seemed to lunge forward. Muzzle flash. Report. Then he crumpled. The other one started to run.

"Hit it." Bracer said as he held the beam on the fleeing black jacket. The squad lunged forward taking the curb, catching the jacket in its lights, running him to ground before he could make the fence at the end of the lot.

He turned. Bracer saw the white patch on his cheek, saw the gun coming up, felt Cooley hitting the brake, spinning the wheel, doing a ninety-degree to give him a clear line to the shooter.

The *Free Press* ran a front page photo of Johnny Doogle and Evan Williger under the headline, DRUG DEALER KILLS BIRMINGHAM MAN. The story below credited Bracer and Cooley for taking down the perp. There was a pint of ink about the drug dealer carrying three bags of Magic, same stuff the poor little Brandon girl had O.D.'d on. No mention, though, that Bracer had fished the bags from Williger's pocket and slipped them into the Snoop Dogg coat. Speculation was that the victim, Williger, who worked at the Medical Center and lived in tony Birmingham, had been abducted from the parking lot of the Snug by known bad guy, Johnny Doogle. No speculation as to the purpose of the snatch. Quote on page 8A, Bracer saying, "Animals on the street, killing innocents, selling dope to kids, it's the duty of the police to hunt them down." Could have said apple pie, fourth of July, Chevy on the levy; to the suburban reader it would have sounded the same.

Next day in a follow-up piece, the Birmingham Chief was quoted as saying he admired the thoroughness and dedication of cops everywhere, and if officers like Bracer and Cooley ever wanted a job, all they had to do was ask. It took a week for Bracer to ask. Cooley never did.

Five hundred attended the dope peddler, Evan Williger's funeral. None showed when they dumped Johnny Doogle in the ground.

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DYING WORDS

ACROSTIC BY ARLENE FISHER

For instructions on how to solve the acrostic puzzle, turn to page 77.
The solution to the puzzle will appear in the May issue.

DEFINITIONS	WORDS
A. About 1 ⅓ fluid drams	28 83 152 132 52 5 88 108
B. Like bluegrass	156 82 43 117 172 90 14 176
C. Tex-Mex dip ingredient	120 15 124 153 75 44 99
D. Back, maybe	89 157 70 23 113 147 42
E. 1964 Sidney Lumet film: hyph. wd.	48 54 100 4 143 62 34 128
F. It can be raised	97 20 115 76 151 91 164
G. Raymond Chandler contemporary: 2 wds.	98 7 134 29 84 36 50 166
H. Parasitic cestode	167 45 63 87 178 104 35 53
I. Hit following "Help!"	46 72 101 30 136 13 163 173 68
J. Hardly trot	79 129 179 10 93
K. Mineral of pure carbon	55 64 175 123 2 165 17 110
L. Tends to one's shoes	69 26 51 122 81 148 24
M. Tended a floor	32 47 144 155 78 109
N. Prep for surgery	159 38 145 170 31 77 126 57 112
O. Bluish purple	119 154 140 127 168 174 74 39

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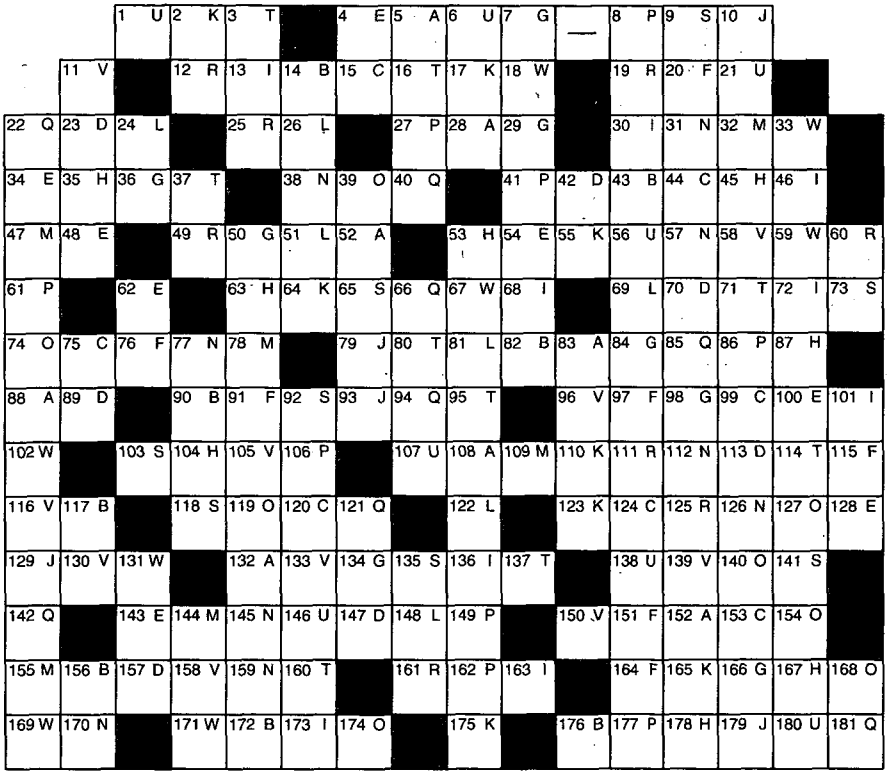

P. Baseball group — 177 8 162 106 149 61 41 27 86

Q. Portal — 40 121 66 94 85 22 142 181

R. American symbol: 2 wds. — 161 49 12 125 60 111 25 19

S. Rise high above — 92 9 103 135 141 73 118 65

T. "Saskia in Profile" artist — 137 3 37 71 80 16 95 114 160

U. Chant — 107 6 138 180 146 56 1 21

V. 1966 Truffaut title start — 11 130 96 105 158 116 139 133 58 150

W. "West Side Story" locale — 171 18 59 33 102 169 131 67

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DEATH INSIDE THE BOX

JOHN H. DIRCKX

"Shave in haste," said Mary Deventer, "and hemorrhage at leisure."

Calvin Deventer sat down at the breakfast table with a cup of coffee in one hand and the morning paper in the other. "That's a new one, isn't it? I don't believe I've ever heard it before."

"Sorry, honey. You wouldn't hear it so often if you didn't cut yourself so often."

"It's just that it sounds so starkly . . . clinical."

"Jargon of the trade. Like when you called Ashleigh a tortfeasor the other night for leaving her skates in the breezeway."

Deventer unfolded his paper. "Speaking of whom," he said, "why all the whispering about fishhooks and waterproof matches before she left for school this morning?"

"She wanted to know which survival kit I thought she ought to take with her today. And she didn't leave for school. She's still up in her room getting dressed. School's closed for teachers' meetings. This is Mother-Daughter Day, remember?"

"Vaguely." He closed his eyes and swallowed half a cup of coffee. "So that means she'll be going to the office with you today?"

"And the hospital, and a couple of nursing homes."

"But not the morgue, I hope?"

"That depends on who did in whom last night."

"But Mary, you wouldn't—?"

"Honey, we can't protect her from this ugly old world forever. She has to learn to live in it and defend herself from it sometime. And I don't know another fourteen year old who's better prepared to start. After all, she isn't going to see anything at the morgue that's much worse than the stuff she watches on her favorite TV programs."

"Well, that's a feeble line of defense if I ever heard one."

"Look at it this way. Maybe being exposed to the real thing will change her mind about what she wants to do with her life."

"When did anything ever change that child's mind?" He laid aside his

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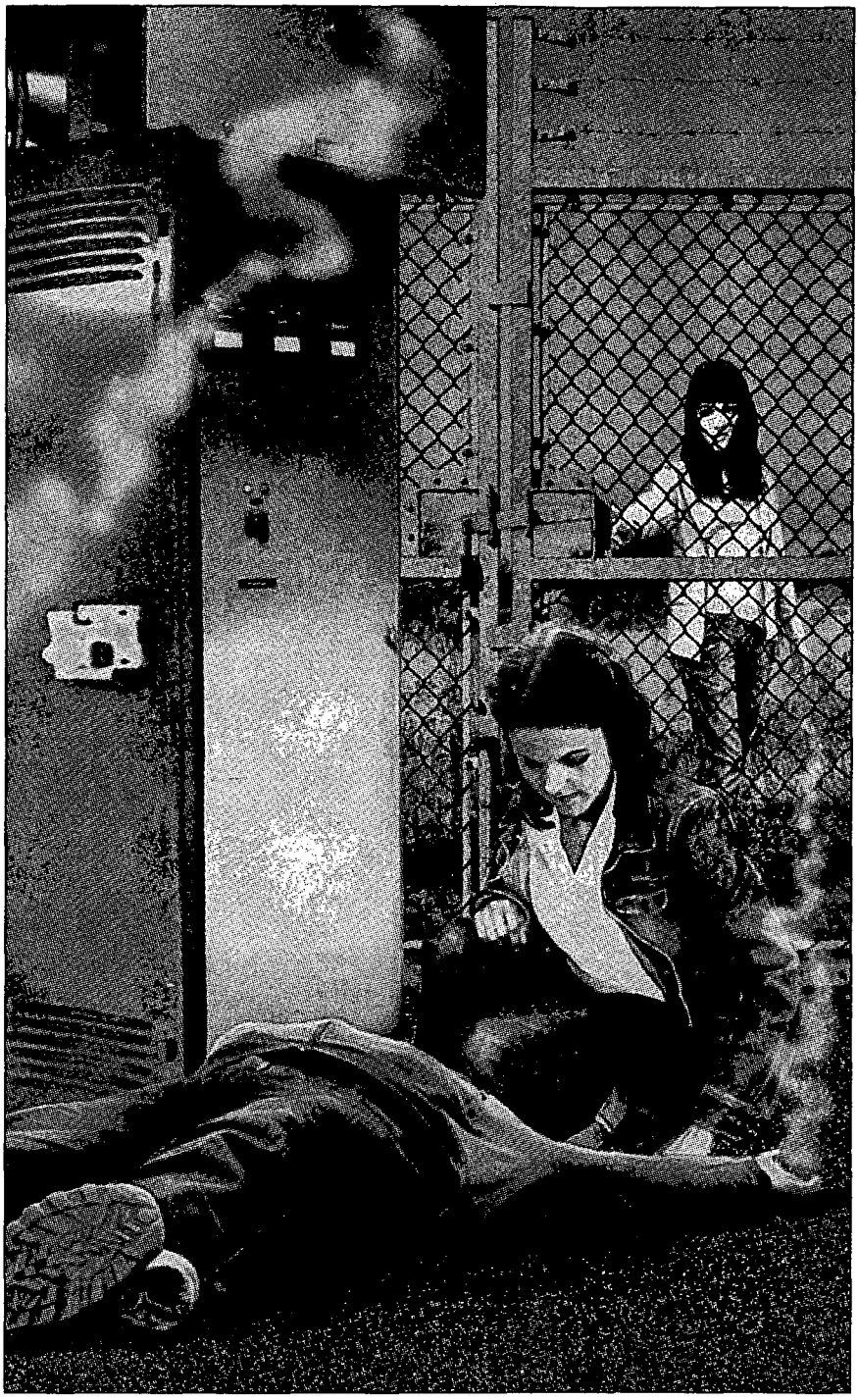

Ron Chironna

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paper and poured more coffee for both of them.

Mary met his grim smile with one of her own brand, flooding the breakfast nook with sunshine in spite of the gray November dawn. "I wonder," she mused, "if you're ever going to come to terms with the awesome responsibility of raising a child prodigy."

"A child prodigy I could handle," he said. "After all, I was one myself."

"Uh-huh."

"But a girl of fourteen whose list of Christmas wishes includes permission to get her ears, nose, eyebrows, and tongue pierced, a pocket knife with fourteen blades and nineteen functions, and a copy of the *Iliad* in Greek—and whose highest aspiration in life is to be a crime scene investigator . . . ? Well, maybe that last part was inevitable for a kid whose mother is the county coroner. Just so you keep her away from that creep Tredwyn."

"Cal, that was all cleared up to everyone's satisfaction more than a year ago."

"Maybe not everyone's."

For Mary and Ashleigh Deventer, Mother-Daughter Day started at the office where Mary conducted her busy family practice. The cold and flu season was well underway, and today there was a run on babies with earaches. Ashleigh had already had plenty of experience restraining tiny thrashing limbs while her mother examined ears or administered immunizations.

Around nine thirty the doctor's proficient and unflappable office nurse Bonnie stepped into the room where they were doing a well-baby check. "Lieutenant Doyle just called, Doctor. There's been a fatal accident at the Ruckfell Road Substation and they'd like you to come over right away."

"An electrocution?"

"He didn't say."

Mary quickly saw two more patients while Bonnie started phoning to reschedule the rest of the morning's appointments. Then she bundled Ashleigh into the car and headed for the scene of the accident. Ashleigh Deventer, a young lady who could be by turns supremely feminine, bookishly studious, and ruggedly athletic, found herself at this moment afire with jubilant anticipation even though they were on their way to investigate an accident rather than a murder.

Three power company trucks, a police car, and an evidence van were parked in a straggling row outside the high chain-link fence that enclosed the power distribution substation on Ruckfell Road. Inside the fence an imposing structure of wooden poles and crisscrossing steel beams supported enormous transformers and a network of overhead cables. Large signs in black on yellow warned, CAUTION – HIGH VOLTAGE – KEEP OUT. A work crew of about a dozen men idled in a rear corner of the gravel-paved enclosure. A growing crowd of onlookers from the neighborhood prowled around outside the fence.

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Police Lieutenant Doyle met them at the gate. He threw Ashleigh a friendly wink and introduced her mother to Lloyd Behrens, safety director for the power and light company.

Ashleigh's initial appraisal of Behrens was distinctly unfavorable: a narrow tie, long out of style; a sport coat with brass buttons, ditto; and a thin pencil-line of mustache like the male lead in one of those old black-and-white movies her dad liked to watch on late night TV.

"How do you do, Doctor?" Behrens looked doubtfully at Ashleigh. "Babysitting this morning?"

Ashleigh's antipathy for the safety director was instantly multiplied a thousandfold.

"She's working with me today."

"School holiday?"

"Something like that."

"Okay, but this is no place for a kid." His jittery, petulant manner made it evident that the death of an employee on the job had shaken him badly.

"Better stay outside the fence, sweet," Mary told Ashleigh. "What happened?" she asked Behrens.

Roger Tredwyn, the police evidence technician, answered for him. "Over here." He led her to a row of tall metal boxes, about the size of shower stalls, with cables sprouting from their tops. Face up on the gravel before the open door of one of the boxes lay a motionless figure clad in an orange coverall. A long tool like a tire iron was partly hidden under his left arm.

Ashleigh, following the group outside the fence, was only a yard or so farther from the scene than her mother.

"Don't even think of touching that box," said Tredwyn. "Each pair of copper contacts inside there carries twenty-three thousand volts."

"So what happened?" asked Mary Deventer again.

"This gang was doing routine maintenance here at the substation this morning," said Behrens. "They pick up litter, look for weather damage and signs of vandalism, test ground lines and relays, and so forth. This is their foreman, Greg Dembault. He was evidently working in this switch and junction box when the tool he was using touched something hot."

"Any witnesses?"

"No, ma'am. One of the guys found him after it was all over. They're all trained in CPR and they did what they could, but by the time the paramedics got here he was gone."

"What's the possibility that something malfunctioned inside the box?"

"Very slim," Behrens assured her, no doubt trembling inwardly at the prospect of an official investigation. "We put a meter on the box and found the ground line intact."

Dr. Deventer knelt beside the supine form of Dembault.

"You can move him, Mary," said Tredwyn. "I've already got pictures, and anyway the ambulance crew shoved him all over the place before the rest of us got here."

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With her forehead pressed against the cold fence, Ashleigh watched intently as her mother, wearing rubber gloves, examined the dead man. His eyes were only half closed, his complexion a ghastly purple. Charred areas on both palms showed where the lethal current had passed in and out.

"Why wasn't he wearing gloves?" asked the doctor. "And why was he using a tool without an insulated handle in such a dangerous place?" When Behrens didn't answer, she twisted around and looked up at him. "Was he a drinker? On drugs?"

"Not as far as I know. Not at nine o'clock in the morning, anyway."

"The blood tests will settle that one way or the other." Mary stood up. "Did he have any health problems? A record of excessive absenteeism? Any history of depression?"

"Nothing like that. He's been with the company for more than ten years. Very sharp at his job, very dependable . . ."

"But . . . ?"

"I might as well say it, because you'll eventually find it out. All those guys over there hated him like poison."

"Because . . . ?"

"He was arrogant, abrasive, demanding, a showoff, a daredevil . . ."

"The kind of person who works around twenty-three-KV equipment without gloves?"

"Exactly."

"And eventually gets himself murdered."

"I didn't say that."

"Not in so many words." She nodded toward the big steel box. "Could this accident have been rigged?"

The overcast autumn sky shed a feeble radiance, like the headlights of a car whose battery is too low to turn over the engine. Behrens peered into the murky interior of the box. "That's hard to say. There isn't enough light inside there for a cat to find its own tail."

"Let's shift him out of the way," said Tredwyn, "so we can get a better view inside."

While her mother was busy helping Doyle and Behrens move Dembault's body from in front of the junction box, Ashleigh tagged along behind Roger Tredwyn toward the evidence van outside the fence. She didn't know all the details of the scandal he had been involved in several months ago, but she felt sure he was an innocent victim of mudslinging. For her, all crime scene investigators were automatically endowed with sterling characters and unimpeachable integrity. And she found Roger's Irish or Welsh accent or whatever it was utterly beguiling.

From the van Tredwyn unloaded an elaborate device on rubber tires with six adjustable floodlights and began wheeling it toward the gate. Ashleigh gripped one side of it to help guide it over the rough ground.

"Haven't you got a flashlight?" she asked.

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"You mean one of those seventy-nine-cent disposable penlights like they use in the TV shows?" His indulgent grin deepened his dimples and brought his crinkly eyelids nearly together. "Those are toys, love. Very effective for casting eerie shadows, but pretty useless otherwise."

"What if there isn't anyplace to plug this in?" she asked.

"No power at the power station? That would be a pretty kettle of fish. But we don't need it. This thing's got batteries inside—big ones. That's why it's so heavy."

The body of Greg Dembault, covered with a blue plastic sheet, now lay at some distance from the scene of the apparent accident. Once Tredwyn set up the lighting device, everybody, including Ashleigh outside the fence, had a clear view of the interior of the switch and junction box. Black and white strands of insulated cable, thicker than garden hose, coiled back and forth between massive clamps. Knife switch contacts and naked copper grounding wires smoldered like old gold in the garish light. Daubs of grease, handfuls of dirt, and festoons of cobwebs completed the picture.

"That makes a lot of difference," said Behrens. He leaned closer to study the interior of the box, with his head tilted back and his hands rammed deep in his coat pockets as if to restrain them from injudicious probing. "And a certain amount of sense."

"Something wrong in there?" asked Doyle.

"Do you see that steel rod running up the right side? That's part of the switch linkage. It's operated by a crank that you put in from the outside through that hole near the bottom. Apparently a cotter key broke off or worked loose, because, as you can see, the bottom end of the rod is more than halfway off its shaft."

"You think Dembault was trying to fix that when he got shocked?"

"That's the way it looks to me," said Behrens. "He must have braced himself against the side of the box with his left hand, and made a circuit with the tool in his right." He straightened up and smoothed down his mustache with an unmistakable air of satisfaction. "This man's death is a catastrophe, of course," he said, "but it was obviously the result of his own negligence rather than that of his employer's."

"Which gets you off the hook with the Feds?" suggested Doyle with brutal frankness.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that. They're still going to rake me over the coals for not having trained Dembault properly and not making sure he used protective equipment and—"

"What's that mark?" asked Tredwyn, pointing to a peculiarly shaped impression in the film of grease and grit on the floor of the box. "Like something was slid in or out."

Behrens squatted, adjusted his bifocals, and stared for several seconds. Then he stood up, very bleak of feature, and glanced furtively toward the work crew, who sat or paced, chatting and smoking, at the far corner of

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the yard. "Make that slid in *and* out," he said. "That mark is a perfect silhouette, almost a photograph, of something that had no business being in there, ever—the core of a heavy-duty overload relay."

Lieutenant Doyle bent to examine the mark. "What's the significance of that, exactly?" he asked. Tredwyn was already shooting more pictures.

"Why, the thing is a powerful magnet," Behrens told him. "It'd pull the fillings right out of your teeth."

No, it wouldn't, said Ashleigh to herself. There's no iron in a filling.

"You're suggesting that somebody put a magnet in there so that it would attract the tool Dembault was using and cause it to touch a hot wire?"

"Exactly. Earlier this morning, when this happened, there was probably just enough sunlight filtering in from the east for Dembault to see the loose linkage, but not enough to show the magnet, which is dull black."

"Where would somebody get hold of one of these things?" asked Doyle.

"Replacement units are standard equipment on all our maintenance trucks."

"Well, then, supposing this is a homicide, one of that troupe of clowns over there must be the killer."

"Exactly. With a relay magnet shoved up his shirt."

"Unless," said Mary Deventer, "he's already hidden it or tossed it over the fence."

"Which is just what he will do," said Doyle, "if we line them up and start searching them."

While the police authorities were discussing strategies with her mother the coroner, Ashleigh went for a stroll around the outside of the fence. By now a substantial mob of the curious had assembled along Ruckfell Road, including housewives with squirming, squalling infants, retired seniors with pipes and canes, and neighborhood urchins with skateboards and foul mouths.

As she came to the far corner of the enclosure, she studied with particular attention the crew whose foreman had apparently been murdered an hour ago. Seen up close they were an uncouth-looking lot, with shaggy hair and beards, beer bellies, and terrible teeth, and they leered at her like a clan—yes, she was sure that was the proper collective noun—of hyenas. In spite of that, she paraded back and forth along that side of the fence several times before completing her circuit of the substation.

Dr. Deventer and the others were still debating the best way to identify the killer.

"Mother."

"But sooner or later," said Doyle, "he'll have to do something with it."

"Mother?"

"Sooner or later," countered Behrens, *"we'd* better do something. If I know OSHA, they'll have a team on-site before high noon."

"Mother!"

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"What is it, sweet?"

"The man with a magnet hidden under his clothes is named Hodge. At least that's what his name tag says."

Behrens looked at her sharply through the fence. "Hodge Cathcart? He's the one who found Dembault. What makes you think he's got a magnet on him?"

Ashleigh showed him her survival kit with a compass in the lid. "Every time I walk past him, the compass needle jumps away from north and points to him."

"So maybe he carries a horseshoe for luck," suggested Tredwyn.

"No, wait a minute, Roger," said Doyle, "I think she's onto something. The guy who found Dembault would have had an opportunity to snatch the magnet back out of the box before anybody else could see it." He turned toward Behrens. "What do we know about Cathcart?"

"To me he's not much more than a name. He's not a lineman, but what we call an auxiliary."

"In other words," suggested Doyle, "a grunt . . . no technical background?"

Behrens conceded the point with a shrug and a nod. "According to him, he was working his way along the fence there spraying herbicide when he saw Dembault lying on the ground. He gave the alarm and the other guys came over and tried resuscitation. Then they called the paramedics."

"I say let's get him away from those other guys and search him," said Doyle. "You'll need to question him eventually, Mary. Why not right now?"

Stocky, round shouldered and mealy mouthed, Hodge Cathcart was showing neither grief nor satisfaction at the death of his foreman. He answered Dr. Deventer's queries clearly and simply, but when invited by Lieutenant Doyle to submit to a pat-down search, he went berserk. A local TV crew arrived just too late to record for posterity the adroit maneuver by which Roger Tredwyn wedged Cathcart into immobility between a wooden pole and the fence.

A search yielded two joints of marijuana taped inside his hard hat, a hunting knife with an eight-inch blade stowed in the top of his right boot, and thirteen pounds of magnetic iron in the shape of a tripper relay core rammed inside the bib of his overalls.

Behrens bustled outside the fence to talk to Ashleigh. "Young lady," he said, brimful of elation as if his horse had just won the Derby, "if you ever need a friend—I don't care if you're bankrupt, or in jail for setting fire to an orphanage—you come straight to me. Will you promise to do that?"

"Sure, I guess so," said Ashleigh with a certain reserve. She hadn't forgotten his remark about babysitting.

"Do you see those three hoodlums getting out of that gray van over there? They're here to skin me alive for committing some hypothetical safety violation that caused the death of a worker. If you hadn't come

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along when you did with your compass, I'd be spending the rest of today getting the third degree. And next week I'd probably be looking for another job."

Lieutenant Doyle loomed up beside them. "Dembault claims a couple of the other guys were in this with him," he told Behrens.

"Great. Fine." Behrens rubbed his hands with grim delight. "Because if he's talking like that, there can no longer be any question of an accident or a safety violation." He dashed off to joust with the federal inspectors, having apparently forgotten Ashleigh already.

A fleet of three police vans arrived to take the entire work crew, including Hodge Cathcart, now in handcuffs, downtown for questioning. A hearse, long retired from active employment in the mortuary trade, bore the remains of Greg Dembault off to the morgue. The TV cameraman ventured ever closer, and a reporter was now interviewing members of the crowd outside the fence.

When Roger Tredwyn passed Ashleigh on his way back to the van with the lighting rig, she walked along with him again. "Do you think I might get on the six o'clock news tonight?" she asked. "I've been rehearsing what I'm going to say, about how I figured out—"

"You want to stay clear of reporters, love," said Tredwyn. "They mean you no good."

She fixed him with a searching look as he wrestled the apparatus into the rear compartment of the van. "Why do you say that?"

"Look you here. It's one thing to lend a hand in a criminal investigation as a private citizen, but it's something else again to take on the risks and burdens of a professional law enforcement officer. For anything we know, this lot of ruffians were all in the plot to kill Dembault. But they won't all go to prison."

Still mystified, Ashleigh listened intently.

"Some of them have already told Lieutenant Doyle and me what they're going to do to us some cold dark night in January. If they had the slightest notion who tipped us off about that magnet . . . you get the idea."

Dr. Deventer, jingling car keys, broke up their session and peered with some misgivings at her daughter's saucer eyes and Roger Tredwyn's devastating dimples. "Come on, sweet," she said. "We're going to have to hustle."

"Are we going to the morgue?"

"No, sweet. Lunch. Bonnie has appointments scheduled for me from eleven right on through the afternoon. And don't forget you have soccer today at two thirty."

"When will—?"

"Probably not until tonight or tomorrow morning. Just whenever Dr. LeMaitre is free to do it."

"But you'll be there too?"

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"Maybe. It depends."

"Could I . . . ?"

"Not this time."

"You always say that. When, Mother?"

"Maybe sometime during the summer, when you don't have school and soccer and math club and so many other things to think about." Mary Deventer drove in silence for a few moments and then added, with more asperity than she had intended, "An autopsy isn't exactly a form of entertainment, you know."

Probably, she told herself, Cal was right. Probably Ashleigh wasn't quite ready for the morgue, or amoral monsters like Hodge Cathcart, or plausible lechers like Roger Tredwyn . . .

But when, Mother?

Solution to the March "Dying Words"

WORD LIST

A. Reaction
B. Reminder
C. Aspirin
D. Yellow flag
E. Nighthawks
F. Easy
G. Ruminated
H. Cashew
I. Hot potato
J. Espresso
K. Authority
L. Porous
M. Domain
N. Everybody
O. Thrust
P. Essential
Q. Compliment
R. Tense
S. Infancy
T. Victory
U. Encyclical
V. Summit

QUOTATION

Author—R(ichard) Rayner
Work—CHEAP DETECTIVES (AND CHEAPER PAPER)
(Newsday, January 27, 2008)

"The pulps won their place in American literary history, sending out to the mass market . . . the cynical private eye . . . and a type of writing that was sometimes—consciously or unconsciously—flavored by modernism."

HOW TO SOLVE AN ACROSTIC

Using the definitions, fill in as many words as you can in the column on the right. Then transfer the letters from the column to their corresponding places in the diagram. A black square in the diagram indicates the end of a word. When completed, the diagram will yield a mystery-themed quotation. The initial letters of the words in the righthand column spell out the name of the author and the work from which the quote was taken.

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DEADLINE EDITION

S. L. FRANKLIN

R. J. Carr

"Read these," my friend Larry told me, and since the lunch was on him I took up the newspaper clippings and read.

The first of the pair, dated about six weeks earlier, May 5, 1994, recounted the discovery of a man's body under the arch of Council Overhang, a famous geological formation in the wilds of Starved Rock State Park in central Illinois. The clothing of the deceased was incongruous, it seemed—a shirt and tie, slacks, a sport coat, and no shoes—not hiking gear, by any means, and as described the man didn't sound like much of an outdoorsman: white male, age around seventy, five feet eight, two hundred twenty pounds, with scars from heart bypass surgery across his chest.

A further oddity, his remains had been laid out neatly, as if in some kind of funeral rite, hands holding a pocket New Testament and folded across the chest, six candles burnt down to stubs in a circle around the body. An autopsy was planned, the story ended, and the usual appeal made for anyone with information about the man to come forward.

The second clipping, dated May 18, began:

> CHICAGO—A pair of mysteries were solved Wednesday when the body of a man found dead in LaSalle County two weeks ago was identified as retired Chicago *Star-Bulletin* staff member James "Jay" Tommasin. Tommasin, age 70, was reported missing on May 11 by concerned neighbors in the condominium building where he resided in west suburban Lombard.

The story went on to cite Lawrence Duvall of the *Star-Bulletin*—otherwise known as Larry, the provider of my lunch and reading material—as among three friends confirming the identification. Yet another oddity— while the autopsy revealed the cause of death to be an ordinary coronary blockage, the body had been transported at great effort after death to the Council Overhang location, described as "an elevated semicircular undercut over fifty feet high in a bluff at the mouth of Ottawa and Kaskaskia Canyons in the Park."

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This clipping also concluded with an appeal "that a solution to this third mystery might be forthcoming now that the body has been identified and the cause of death determined to be a natural one."

When I looked up from my reading, Larry Duvall said, "One lie or maybe two in the second story. Tommasin was no friend of mine—or of the other two guys either. He didn't run to friends."

"But you knew him?"

"Sure I knew him. Old school journalist right out of *The Front Page*. Booze and cynicism."

"Sounds like you."

He shook his head. "You know I don't drink."

Larry was my age, fifty-one, five-nine and one sixty with a graying crew-cut and glasses. In 1957 he and I had met the first day of high school as freshmen and struck up a friendship—not close but not distant—that's still going in the new millennium. After Army service he'd entered the newspaper business and risen up on the editorial side, while I'd gone from college to private eye work and gradually drifted away from investigation toward security consulting. Once while I was still mostly a shamus—1977—I'd broken a high-profile case and given Larry the exclusive story, something he'd never forgotten to thank me for in his Christmas cards. He'd never sprung for lunch before, though, not in thirty-seven years.

"Also," he said, "Tommasin was married three times. Three disasters."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning I never wrecked anyone's life. Besides, after I went to your wedding I knew I could never be satisfied with mere mortal flesh."

I decided to give in. "All right: you're buying lunch; you're complimenting Ginny. What do you want?"

"You know what I want, R. J. A solution to the third mystery in that second article."

"What's happened to those red-hot investigative reporters your paper brags about?"

"Let's say . . . their enthusiasm has cooled."

"After a month."

"After less than a month."

"Mine would too."

"You wouldn't take a month."

"Backhanded compliments aren't your style."

I waited while Larry eyed me with a glass of ice water raised halfway to his lips. "One," I continued, "I don't work for free. Two, the trail is stone cold frozen. Three, there doesn't seem to be any reason to care. It was a prank or the act of a fanatic."

He drank most of the water in the glass, then replied, "In reverse order: The *Star-Bulletin* cares because Jay Tommasin's byline was in it for thirty years—that's three. In 1977 you picked up a trail that was eighteen years old and ran it right up the back of a senatorial candidate—that's two.

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We're offering five big ones for *your* byline, R. J., on the solution to the mystery and how you found it out—that's numero uno."

"Is this your idea?"

"Nope. I'm just known to know you, so I'm the messenger boy. In the new austerity regime, though, if you turn me down the lunch is on me, not the expense account."

"Why me?"

"Why?" he echoed. "Last summer in that river boat business you were all over our front page and all the other news outlets in town—and, yeah, you didn't like it. But now, R. J., you're hot. You're Mr. Private Eye. You'll sell papers."

"Right. As in 'How I was baffled by the Council Overhang mystery.'"

"Not a chance." He waited, so I did too. "Okay. I'm authorized to go to seventy-five hundred to seal the deal." He made a face. "And expenses."

I exhaled a lot of air, then asked him, "So which of the two would be better for you personally, Larry? Five or seven-five?"

"What do you think?"

"I think *you* think I'm the world's biggest sucker."

"Well?"

"All right. For five thousand and expenses because I guess you must be right."

"Welcome to the wonderful world of journalism—sucker."

Questions of gullibility aside, saying no to Larry on any legitimate request was impossible, and in this instance, as he went on to explain, there was more to it than just bumping circulation for a few days. Two other papers and *Chicago* magazine were all digging into the story, and Larry's superiors couldn't stomach the thought of seeing a headline like "Mystery of *Star-Bulletin* Reporter's Death Solved" under another publication's banner. "Subhead," Larry had remarked, "Mass Panic Attacks Editorial Board."

Not that this made the problem any easier, since the trail was not only "stone cold frozen," to quote myself; most of it was obliterated by the footprints of the cops and reporters who'd come up with nothing trampling over it in the previous weeks. When I'd expressed this thought to Ginny that night, she'd replied, "Yes. And to vary slightly from that same tired metaphor, what's needed now, I think, is a shortcut. Or wouldn't you agree?"

Twenty years into our marriage Ginny was still pretty much the same as she'd been on our wedding day—beautiful without trying, in other words. Black hair, fair complexion, icy blue eyes, perfect features, and a perfect frame to match. She wasn't a goddess, though—Larry's implication had been off the mark there, which was lucky for me. Goddesses don't often marry linebacker-sized detectives with birthmarked, bespectacled faces.

"Shortcuts are fine when you know the destination," was my reply of the

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moment, anyway. "I talked a little with the *Star-Bulletin* reporter who had the assignment—"

"You pumped him, I trust."

"Her—but, yeah. That goes without saying."

"And?"

"It's the woman's view. Generational too, I'd guess. Tommasin was seventy, she's thirty-three. Marybeth Reineke by name. Views provided over beverages at the Billy Goat."

"My, my."

"I was after a couple of things, but the first was just a basic profile of Jay Tommasin. A man without friends, she told me, which I already knew. Lived in the condo out in Lombard since his last divorce. Wrote unpaid restaurant reviews for the suburban Angle Press chain, quite a comedown for a guy who was the paper's star crime reporter in the eighties. Neither of his ex-wives still living would agree to go out and identify him—that's why Larry and the others went. According to Marybeth, he could charm the birds out of trees when he wanted, but he had a habit of turning on people and berating them with a nasty, quick tongue. He flayed all three of his wives verbally, especially after they found out about his habit of hitting on younger women in bars, any young woman, any bar—and not too surprisingly, he spent most of his time in bars."

"He sounds rather like a Ngaio Marsh murder victim."

"Maybe. Except he wasn't murdered. I'll give you a little more on that subject in a minute, but let me finish with Marybeth. She and the *Trib* reporter pooled resources and tried to check out people who might have found some kind of satire or poetic justice in lighting candles and putting scripture in the hands of a deceased old reprobate—"

"But, R. J.—"

"Right. Big stumbling block. Why drive all the way out to Starved Rock to hold the ceremony? So that was the next bright idea of the journalistas—to find out what connection the guy had with Starved Rock or that general vicinity. Nothing.

"So Marybeth went on her own and actually tried to trace his movements. The police, according to her, hadn't done a very thorough job, since the business didn't involve a serious crime. She didn't get a lot further, though. Tommasin lived alone and didn't have any friends. The local bar he frequented gave her a definitive No. And although he wasn't a recluse, his neighbors in the apartment complex only saw him occasionally coming in or going out. The person who saw him last—so far as we know—was a cab driver who picked him up at his condo and dropped him in front of a theater in downtown Naperville at about five in the afternoon two days before he was found dead."

"Two days before. That sounds less than promising."

"Yeah. And nobody within a three block radius of the theater could

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remember ever seeing the guy in the photo Marybeth showed around, so the point is moot."

"For the moment it is. True. What about . . . or rather, you said he was a restaurant critic. Mightn't he have been on an assignment, the next night if not that one?"

"That's what Marybeth thought, so she talked to his editor at Angle Press and learned a little. He wrote the reviews under the name of The Food Dude, and like any restaurant critic he had to be as anonymous and forgettable as possible. Also secretive, according to this editor. He didn't tell anyone what place he was going to review next. He just filed his story by a certain deadline and the editor printed it if he liked it and had space.

"This is where Marybeth got stalled, and if any other reporters got farther it wasn't by much, or I'd be superfluous to the affair."

"Yes. I . . . You said something about his death—"

"Oh. I talked long distance to the doc who did the autopsy. He said it was a plain old coronary, nothing special, the kind caused by an unhealthy lifestyle, only big enough to stop a truck. I wanted more but he was busy, so I made an appointment for tomorrow at one thirty."

"And you're going to Starved Rock, too, I trust. The school year ended yesterday." She was a guidance counselor. "Mightn't I come along?"

Ginny Carr

"Is this stop really necessary?" I asked as R. J.'s Chevy slowed to a halt across from a sprawling condominium complex. We had been on our way to Starved Rock State Park and then to an interview with the medical examiner of LaSalle County, not to a residence the third suburb over from our own.

"Yep," my husband replied. "Forgot to mention it."

"Conveniently. Since you knew that I wouldn't approve."

"Marybeth couldn't stomach going through Tommasin's things, that's all. I'm guessing the cops made some kind of search when he was reported missing, but at that point they didn't know what to look for."

"Do you?"

"Nope."

"Then I'll come in with you, and after we're arrested, perhaps we can share the same cell." Because, of course, R. J.'s design was to break into Jay Tommasin's living quarters. After twenty years of marriage I knew him well enough to understand both his aim and his logic: Illicit entry was always quicker and generally far more private than requesting keys from a potentially suspicious caretaker who could demand to be present during any search and who might refuse access. I also knew that R. J. had no peer in this particular line of disreputable enterprise. He had an uncanny ability to make himself inconspicuous, for one thing—in spite of his enormous size—and as I watched he slipped on a cap that matched his trousers, grinned at me, then got out of the car to don a similarly colored workman's shirt that had been hidden under the driver's seat.

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"Give me seven minutes, then buzz 311 in the building to the right," he told me, an indication that he had surveyed the property earlier. "I'll let you in."

"Meanwhile, I'll keep the engine running for a getaway," was my unfunny reply.

After he had removed a pair of toolboxes from the trunk and ambled off, I experienced the first of several *frissons* that in retrospect seem to highlight my part in what then appeared to be an unremarkable investigation. That the excitement I felt stirring in my blood wasn't pleasant ought to have warned me, I suppose, but upon joining R. J. in Jay Tommasin's residence without eliciting so much as a curious stare, my sense of unease passed away.

The apartment, contrary to my expectations, was reasonably neat and pleasantly furnished in a masculine style, although I could have foregone the atmosphere of stale cigar smoke. "What are we looking for?" I asked.

"You tell me."

"We-e-ll . . . A calendar or appointment book. Any notations about restaurants, I would say." I looked around, but when I noticed the row of liquor bottles on the kitchen cabinet below the phone my imagination failed me. "What else, do you think?"

"Oh—address book. Will. The guy had no living relatives—two ex-wives, no children—but somebody benefits, unless he died intestate."

"As for his dying, I understood you to say he succumbed to heart failure."

"Just repeating what I was told. Coroners have been wrong, and there's no use doing this with an entirely closed mind, especially if somebody benefits. What about shoes?"

"Shoes? True—because his were absent. They wouldn't be here, though, unless he died here, and . . ." My second *frisson*. Prior to that moment I hadn't seriously considered the darker element of the affair: How Jay Tommasin's body, a large, conspicuous dead weight, had to have been transported not merely *to* Council Overhang but also *from* another place, all in secrecy.

"It didn't happen here," R. J. proclaimed.

"How do you know?"

"You're the logical thinker, but . . . All right, too hard, too far. The candles would have been lit out in that courtyard." He gestured toward a sliding glass door, beyond which lay a balcony overlooking an enclosed expanse of lawn. "Plus, I've broken and entered too many places not to spot a fix-up. This place says Tommasin walked out on his own power."

And so we searched, I slowly, R. J. with the speed of experience and expertise. He discovered an address book which he "borrowed" by stashing it in one of the toolboxes. I found a calendar, but nothing was written on it. We listened together as an answering machine played back six inconsequential messages.

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In the bedroom we found an old-fashioned desk upon which sat a very modern personal computer, a device we both approached with trepidation, though for different reasons. It was not until the following year that R. J. gave in to the inevitability of learning the uses of computers, and so he felt at a loss. As for me, although an identical computer terminal sat on my work desk at the high school and I used it for various professional tasks, I was leery of "booting up" someone else's PC and more leery of what we might find. We searched the rest of the desk together without positive result until R. J. finally gave me a meaningful look and said, "Well?"

I sat before the machine reluctantly, returning an equally meaningful look, then switched it on and waited for it to come alive.

"I'll just check out the closet," R. J. said from behind me.

Icons and windows and the barricade of logins and passwords eventually appeared. Like many people, however, Jay Tommasin had his code words pre-entered, allowing me to skip over the first hurdle. "Good," I commented over my shoulder. "He wasn't online."

"What?"

"He didn't have Internet access—thank God. No e-mail, no x-rated downloads. He's rather behind times. This is just his typewriter and record keeper." I scrolled through file titles: old restaurant reviews; what looked to be a draft manuscript called "Life of Crime: a Reporter's Notebook"; tax worksheets. The title "Possibles" caught my eye, and a few seconds later I had before me a list with occasional comments, the final seven items being: Turnkey's—No; Cucina Sicilia—Done; Haven Grill—Hold; Mandar-Inn—Done; Popoudopolous; 48; Andalusia.

"R. J.!" I turned in the swivel chair. "I've found the names of three—no, four—restaurants he was thinking of reviewing."

"Good." His head emerged from a closet. "I've found shoes. I need your opinion."

"Oh?" I joined him at the closet entrance where he gestured toward the interior floor. "Wing tips, three pairs, and what I think of as old-style summer ventilator shoes, one pair. Nothing else but house slippers, suggesting an anachronistic fashion sense. So . . . what was he wearing around May fourth?"

"Wing tips or ventilator shoes, I would guess, depending on the weather."

"I suppose." R. J. glanced at his watch, then said, "Departure time. Can you copy those restaurant names while I tidy up?"

At 11:17 we pulled into the parking lot nearest Council Overhang after a drive of nearly two hours that included a stop at the park entrance for a fresh map. Having become avid summer and weekend hikers over the years, we were fairly well acquainted with Starved Rock. It was the uncontested monarch of Illinois' state parks, for one thing, especially given its unpromising locale. It was a place of lush forests, magnificent river bluffs, deep canyons, and high waterfalls virtually hid-

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den in the heart of the flatland cornfields that dominate the northern two-thirds of the state. Notwithstanding our several trips there, however, we hadn't managed to explore the somewhat isolated eastern end and so had never seen the famous Council Overhang, a negligence soon to be remedied.

The sky was a high gray overcast that morning, and against it as I got out of the car I sighted a pair of long-legged white egrets circling lazily over the river to the north.

For a moment we stood and watched, but only a moment. We had come dressed for hiking with the aim of combining pleasure with business, and our time was short.

"They must have used this parking lot," R. J. commented as we crossed to the trail junction. "From the map it looks as if the overhang isn't that far, a quarter of a mile or so, but still . . ."

Yes, I thought after we entered under the forest canopy, but still, carrying a heavy corpse a quarter of a mile through what must have been the darkness of night . . . over what is turning out to be a hilly, meandering, root-plagued path. And later, A path that drops steeply to a plank bridge over a stream . . . before following the stream around a high bluff to—

Suddenly through the foliage above us we could make out a gaping cut in the bluff, a broad arch with a receding interior, the depth of which was impossible to judge from the forest floor below.

"Wow," R. J. said in an uncharacteristic tone of wonder. He looked back to assess the wooded trail we had traversed thus far, then forward at the moderately steep ascent up to the council chamber. "I don't know," he muttered.

"I don't either."

We made the fifty-yard climb in silence, then strode across the flat, sandy floor until we stood at the epicenter of the near-perfect sandstone arc. Here, I thought, in this place in centuries past, Pontiac and his warriors may have sojourned; Jacques Marquette celebrated Mass; Illiniwek from across the broad river came to hold tribal council.

A new *frisson* chilled me eerily: In this mystic, golden place a mock funeral had been put on in travesty ritual over the gross corpse of a man far less sacred than profane.

"And now," R. J. remarked as if continuing his previous comment, "I know even less."

"Yes, because what happened makes no sense as an act of cult fanaticism, and even less sense as a prank."

"It's almost insane." R. J. looked down at the trail. "If there's such a thing as group insanity. It took a minimum of three people to get the body here, one to light the way and two to carry. More likely five, though, given the state of the path and the dead weight."

"The candles too." I looked at the golden sand at my feet and found it difficult to envision their grotesque arrangement.

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We stared out through the leafy woods and down to the stream below, then south toward the point where two canyons joined to make one. Sounds came to us of other hikers' voices, feet splashing as they forded the stream beyond our sight.

"Well," R. J. said, "let's explore while we can."

After a hurried fast food lunch in Ottawa, we drove to the new hospital on the eastern border of the town to meet with David Roeper, M.D., the physician who had performed the autopsy on Jay Tommasin. Dr. Roeper proved to be a tall, balding man in his forties, brisk but not brusque in manner, who took in R. J.'s size and birthmark and my mud-spattered Levi's—ourselves generally, I felt—with a panoramic gaze that bespoke intelligence and curiosity.

"Been out to the overhang, I see," he stated in a droll tone. "I went myself."

A faint uncertainty in his expression inspired me to ask why, and he made a quizzical face with raised eyebrows. "Three women were murdered in the park in 1960—way before my time—but this is probably the biggest Starved Rock mystery since. Not just kids setting off M-80s to get an echo."

"But you stand by your findings that Tommasin died of natural causes," R. J. said, "so it's not really on a par with the three women either."

"It was for a while as far as the sheriff was concerned, not that he cares now. When the deceased turned out to be from Chicago, well—you folks are crazy up there." After shrugging like a deadpan humorist, he glanced at his watch, then back at R. J. "You had questions?"

"A few. My information has it that Tommasin died elsewhere and was transported to the overhang. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Were there signs of his being tied up—to be carried, I mean?"

"Oh, yes. Wrists and ankles."

"Tied up *after* he died?"

"Hmm . . . yes. Although I don't want to complicate your picture of the man's state, but there were inconclusive signs that his wrists might have been bound earlier too."

"Twice, you're saying, and once while he was still alive?"

"I'm not *saying*, Mr. Carr. He might have worn a wristwatch that chafed."

R. J. pondered briefly. "Did you check his blood alcohol level?"

"As part of the autopsy, yes. It was zero."

"Last meal?"

"Around seven P.M., two or three hours before he died."

"Rigor set in—when?"

"After the body was laid out at the overhang, in the wee small hours, as they say."

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"Were there any weird things at all about the body, other than the chafing?"

"Yes, although I don't see any connection to the cause of death, and finding that, quite frankly, was the purpose of the autopsy."

"Are they secret?"

"The autopsy report is public record. The sheriff preferred not to highlight . . . certain facets."

"And you?"

The doctor looked at his watch for the fifth time in five minutes, then shrugged. "In layman's terms, there were slight signs of burning on the deceased's face and hands and in his nasal and upper bronchial region. Very slight. They had no bearing on the cause of death. I performed certain tests and discovered that the inflammation was from exposure to ammonia."

"Ammonia?"

"When you and Mrs. Carr leave the hospital, I suggest that you turn left and follow the highway to the next junction. On your right as you approach you'll see an open lot fairly covered over with large mobile tanks. This is farm country, and sometime in April or May most of the farmers in the area have one or more of those tanks on their property to nitrogenize the fields. They contain pressurized anhydrous ammonia, you see, that breaks down after it's been injected in the soil and leaves the nitrogen behind."

"So the sheriff—"

"He doesn't consult me, but I have no doubt that his men were out trying to find which of the local farms had anhydrous ammonia on hand that week. When the body was identified as from out of the area, the hypothesis became less tenable, so they went back to arresting speeders and drunks and arriving at scenes of domestic violence too late to do any good."

Another glance at his watch inspired R. J. to ask quickly, "One more thing. Could some shock or emotional upset have instigated Tommasin's heart attack?"

"Possibly, although that happens far less often that people think. As for deliberate instigation, I'm certain not. But the whole business is either so crazy or so calculated otherwise—or so lucky—that it's hard to posit one theory at the expense of another."

R. J. continues

On our drive home from Ottawa that afternoon Ginny and I talked our way around the affair to the point of hoarseness, but we really never got any farther than our first exchange.

Me: So what do you think?

Ginny: I think what was done wasn't crazy, R. J. It was lucky enough, certainly, their not being spotted from the road, even in the dead of night. But lucky or not, it wasn't insane, because it was calculated instead. It wasn't a

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prank. No one's leg was pulled, and too much effort was expended for there not to have been a more focused result than a few newspaper headlines. The location is completely wrong also. I wasn't sure before, but having seen it . . .

Me: And the crank theory?

Ginny: The candles and the Testament—again, having seen Council Overhang and the trail— the candles and the Testament simply aren't enough, considering the person Jay Tommasin was known to be. They're meant to affect the appearance, when taken along with the mystic aura of the locale, of there being something either transcendent or fanatical in the perpetrators' aim, but it's all calculation. I'm sure of it. The true aim was to obscure what the true aim really was.

Me: Right. To get rid of Tommasin's body.

Ginny: Yes. Now you talk for a while.

Me: Okay. Given that aim I'd say it's logical to assume that when Tommasin dropped dead, it was in a compromising place or circumstance among people who didn't want to go through the normal channels of reporting a death because they were up to no good.

Ginny: I concur. And given the man's known character, the compromising place or circumstance ought to involve a bar. But it doesn't.

Me: Right. The most amazing piece of real evidence we have—and I almost didn't ask—is the blood alcohol level.

Ginny: Like the dog that failed to bark in the night. I confess to being confused about the ammonia, though. Or . . . I don't know how to interpret it.

Me: Then don't. Ammonia's still a fairly common household chemical. You don't have to go to a farm in the spring to find some.

Ginny: True. You realize, though, that the absence of alcohol indicates almost certainly that whatever company he kept, either near Chicago or near Starved Rock, he failed to return home from Naperville the night prior to his death. The fact that he ate, however—

Me: Or was fed.

Ginny: A chilling thought. Why do you suppose anyone would abduct and hold against his will a fat old restaurant reviewer?

Me: Because he was a fat old ex-crime reporter.

Late the following afternoon I had a small stroke of luck, but other things happened in the meantime. After we got home from Ottawa, for instance, we looked up the four restaurants on the list Ginny copied from Tommasin's computer and discovered that one of them was in downtown Naperville. This plus the evidence of the cab driver, plus the absence of alcohol in Tommasin's system when he died made downtown Naperville a fairly interesting place to us in spite of Marybeth Reineke's inability to trace him there.

After dinner that night, for a second instance, I paid a return call on

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Tommasin's condo with a ream of paper and a list of detailed instructions and managed to print off the text of "Life of Crime: A Reporter's Notebook" without too many false steps.

The next morning I was on the phone early talking to Larry Duvall.

"I see you're wasting no time," was his greeting.

"We can hope, anyway. Marybeth told me Tommasin was a crime reporter for twenty years. Can you fill that in a little?"

"Ask me a hard one. From the late sixties to the late eighties, I'd guess. After that he hung on a while being a general nuisance. He liked the crime beat and cozying up to cops, but what he really liked was acing out those same cops on a crime story, which made him as popular with the force as he was with everyone else, naturally. He got a big scoop every once in a while as a result. He had his own network of stool pigeons and hangers on, I remember that much. So what's this leading up to? Something juicy, I hope."

"I'd say we're about a third of the way there, but don't print anything or you'll blow my cover. I'd like a favor. Get me copies of Tommasin's biggest bylines of the eighties and anything else you come across that seems to contribute to . . . I don't know. Any overriding interests he had in certain criminals or patterns of crime. I'll swing by around two to pick the stuff up."

"Around two? I'll do what I can. I only have about five other duties here besides being your runner."

"Make it three, then."

"What a pal you are."

Parking by the old *Star-Bulletin* building was always impossible, so I pulled in a lot a few blocks away and hoofed it. Even though I was early, Larry was waiting for me with a large envelope in hand just inside the public entrance, and when he saw me he pointed and said, "Let's talk for a minute outside."

It was middling hot in the suburbs, but there near the Lake the air was cool and as fresh as vehicular gridlock allowed. I let him lead me down to the lower stagings by the river before I asked, "What's up?"

He watched an approaching tour boat for a few seconds before replying, "You are. Marybeth made the mistake of identifying you to one of her friends on the *Trib* after you left the Billy Goat the other day. I didn't hear about it till a couple of hours ago, and as much as I'd like to wring her neck—" He illustrated with gestures. "—that's not my job. It ups the ante though, as far as what you're doing is concerned. The bright boys and girls who decided to hire you are now running hot and cold because we're going to look damned foolish bringing you in unless you crack the mystery."

"And soon too. I get the picture."

"There's more. If we're beat into print, they're interpreting the agreement as a hundred percent conditional, so you won't get paid anything." A shrug. "If you feel like walking, of course . . ." Larry waited, but since I

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didn't know what to say, I didn't say it. "Anyway, I'll make sure your expenses are covered regardless."

I waited again, then said, "Did you get the stuff I wanted?"

"Some. Jay's big interests in the eighties were Latino gangs and crack cocaine—how it came in and took over. He actually wrote a series that led to some arrests and convictions of a few mid-league players. It's all here."

I took the envelope he held out and tucked it under my arm, then led the way back up to street level, doing a little elemental thinking as we climbed the stone steps. "Let's go at it this way," I told him when we got to the top. "We have no written agreement and they're prepared to break the verbal one. Tell them I consider it broken, and when I find out what happened my story goes to the highest bidder. That's for them. For you, tell them I said privately that since you and I are friends I'm still giving you first crack—you personally. But not for five thousand."

We shook hands and I hurried off to ransom back my car.

If Tommasin were reviewing a restaurant, how would he go about it? That was the question I mulled on my drive out to Naperville. The old town center had been rehabbed and gentrified into a district of entertainment, dining, boutique shopping, and crawl-and-stall traffic, and by the time I was on my feet in front of the theater, I'd decided this much—that five P.M. was far too early to review a restaurant, meaning that Tommasin had either seen a show first or killed time in a bar, if restaurant reviewing had been his aim.

I took a stroll heading north in the direction of the Haven Grill, and when I got there I read the dinner menu in the display case by the door. It featured steaks, chicken, and seafood with a French emphasis, at sticker prices the homey name of the place didn't begin to suggest. After a glance inside I strolled on to the next corner, turned west in the direction of the alley, and when I got to the alley turned again, where fifty feet ahead of me was my stroke of luck.

A man about forty years of age was seated on an old kitchen chair with his chin settled on his chest, dozing in the late afternoon heat. He was short and burly with thick legs and a long trunk. His dark hair was trimmed in a buzz cut, and his clothes were faded and ill fitting, although I noticed that later. He came awake suddenly as I stood there by the street, and when he looked my way he let out a yowl, shot up from the chair, and started off in a gimpy-legged scurry, hellbent for the other end of the alley.

"Hey!" I shouted. "I'm not—"

He'd only gone about twenty yards when he looked back with terror in his eyes, and that sank him. His floppy shoes got tangled up and he pitched forward hard onto the pavement.

"Ow! Ow–ow–ow!"

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I ran up and knelt, and he hid his eyes and sobbed, afraid—or so I guessed—of my birthmarked face. Meanwhile a UPS delivery truck had geared up at the far end of the alley, and after watching it advance I stood and waved to make sure it stopped.

"Is he hurt?" the driver shouted down at me.

"Some," I answered. "He's mainly scared."

The driver got out, a cocky young guy with a cigarette behind his ear, and walked over to the man who had fallen. "Tommy! Hey! Get up! You're not foolin' anyone!"

"Dat *man!*" Tommy howled.

"He's right here—no uglier than you are. C'mon. Get out of my way, or I'll run you over like a rat!" The driver winked at me and together we helped Tommy to his feet. "Tommy lives *here,*" the driver said, spreading his arms to indicate the alley generally.

"Ever since my brudder died," Tommy said in a lisp. "I dunno."

"You okay?"

"Yeah."

"Then I'm gone," said the driver.

Tommy and I stood back to let the truck pass, and while he was watching it, I took a good look at his ventilator shoes before asking, "Those shoes are a little big for you, aren't they?"

"Yeah. Dey tripped me."

"Where'd you find them? I had a friend who lost a pair like those someplace around here, and he's giving a big reward to get them back."

"How much?" Tommy said. " 'Cause I onie got dese here."

"A hundred dollars," I said. "But I have to know where you found them first."

Tommy looked left, then right, then started down the alley in a slower version of his gimpy-legged run. When I caught up he was standing opposite another building set well back from the alley, beyond which I could see two busboys smoking cigarettes beside a garbage dumpster. A sign over a doorway read, HAVEN GRILL. NO DELIVERIES AFTER 4:00 P.M.

"In dere," Tommy said, directing me with his eyes to the dumpster. "I . . . dey don't care if I take leftovers, I guess."

"Uh-huh. Where do you sleep?"

"Back dere, where I was sittin'. I got a bed in da back room, me an' da cat. I sweep up."

After learning that his last name was Honig, I made Tommy come with me to a shoe store I'd noticed earlier, and while we were there the *Star-Bulletin* popped for a pair of premium walkers in his size, plus some socks. He wore the walkers out, which let me use the box to carry the old ventilator shoes. After that a hundred dollars cash changed hands, all I had on me, and I went back to the car and drove home. I wanted to think a little before dining at the Haven Grill.

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Ginny again

A hike across the verdant bluffs and beside the shaded riverbank of Starved Rock Park is one thing. A tramp from one isolated residence to another—and another!—along Route 71 to the east of the park is quite a different matter, especially on a sweltering afternoon under a relentless sun. The tramp was my own suggestion, I admit; the ninety-three humid degrees coming mid June instead of mid July or August was not. Whereas the Naperville end of the investigation had come to an impasse, the necessity to make haste remained, and therefore I soldiered along the highway verge regardless of less than perfect weather.

The progress of the case to that point had been marked. It had been broached to R. J. on Monday. Tuesday had seen our initial excursion to the park. On Wednesday he had made his first and highly revelatory trip to Naperville, and on Thursday evening he had returned there with the aim of penetrating to the secret, if any, hidden behind the front of the Haven Grill. Owing to previous commitments I hadn't accompanied him on either Naperville trip, but when he arrived home at nine o'clock Thursday night I was waiting with a sense of anticipation.

After settling next to me on the sofa he began, "Here goes. I walked into the place alone at twenty to seven and got the private booth of my choice with no trouble since the dining room was practically empty. Curiosity made me scout the bar on a trip to the men's room, and when I saw lots of activity there, I wondered if it might really be an old-style drinks and dining club in spite of the fancy menu. Wrong—or probably, since my waiter was a suave older guy who knew the food offerings and knew what he was doing, plus the food was first rate—"

"What did you have?"

"Smoked salmon tart appetizer—"

"Grr."

"—and a grilled duck entree that wasn't on the menu. Both deserve to be reviewed. I wasn't really there for the food, though, so I chatted up the waiter the whole time about the absence of patrons versus the crowded bar, and got him talking about the place generally, looking for any kind of opening. Nothing.

"The dessert cart was pretty predictable so I passed, but when he brought the check I played my desperation hand and said that I was so impressed by the dinner I'd had that I'd like to tell the owner if he was there. Nope. Manager?" R. J. sighed. "The manager was a bean counter type and his office told me nothing. The chef, then? So I saw the chef and gushed about the duck and tried to get an idea of the layout of the nonpublic areas where Tommasin might have been held. Other than the manager's office there was a small meeting room. I had a beer at the bar before I left, and if I spotted anything relevant it was there because back in a corner booth I saw a man and a woman who didn't fit in talking very seriously and quietly to one of the waiters. Not mine. The man was dressed like a day laborer who'd come

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straight from the job digging ditches, and the woman wore cutoff shorts and a tank top and was constantly looking around, sort of like she was afraid. Things changed hands, I'm not sure what, then the couple got up to leave, only they went out through the back, which I didn't feel like risking, not on their heels, and by the time I'd skirted around to the alley they were gone."

"They might not have had any connection to Jay Tommasin anyway."

"Probably didn't. They owed the waiter money, or he's the woman's ex-husband, or—who knows? The point is, I didn't get to follow them, and they were the only moderately fishy thing I came across, so we're at a dead end, sort of. Did you go through that manuscript?"

"Yes. And the packet Larry gave you." It was my turn to sigh. "If your evening turned up nothing, my three hours of study turned up its virtual equivalent—everything. And you, at least, got a gourmet dinner."

"One of my few perks. Explain *everything*."

I leaned against him and drew my legs up on the sofa before saying, "Larry may have told you that Latino gangs and crack cocaine were Jay Tommasin's big interests, but I didn't find them so particularly, especially not in his memoir. He wrote about mob assassinations, two famous rape-abduction cases, that horrible young woman who hired killers to murder her parents back in the seventies and got caught immediately afterward. He wrote about *you*, R. J. Carr, you and Anton Wojtusik and the Austin District corruption trial—and he barely mentions the El Norte gang or cocaine in that chapter, so he wasn't particularly interested in his pet topics then.

"Otherwise he did everyday stories about burglars and loan sharks and missing persons. The big series on crack cocaine was simply his last hurrah."

"So we have dead ends at home and abroad—that's what you're saying."

"Yes. Well, not entirely. That is . . . I've been thinking about a remark you made."

"R. J. Carr, Inspirational Speaker."

"Quiet, please. When we were at the condominium Tuesday morning you pointed out that pranksters or zealots would not have transported Jay Tommasin to Starved Rock to make whatever impression they were trying to make, since doing so was too difficult. They would simply have laid him out in the condominium courtyard."

"We agreed later, though, that pranksters and zealots were out of the picture."

"But the reasoning still holds. I have . . . or rather, there's an objection to it."

I sat up and looked at my husband, who surely saw the diffidence in my expression, although he only said, "Okay. First the reasoning, then the objection."

"The reasoning goes thus: Council Overhang was the nearest safe venue to dispose of the body in a way that would misdirect the attention of the authorities, and therefore Jay Tommasin must have died not merely in

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LaSalle County, but quite close to the east end of the park. The objection is that the Illinois River is right there as well, and throwing the body into the water would have been far simpler and just as effective."

R. J. stared at me blankly for several seconds before responding, "No. Not at all. Because the body would have drifted downstream to that lock and dam below Eagle Bluff, and the local police would have started their investigation by looking upstream to find out where it came from. So logically, I think—"

"I think we need to ignore the problem of Jay Tommasin's disappearance from Naperville until further notice. You've just convinced me that, strange as it may sound, he died not merely east of the park, but somewhere in that narrow strip between the highway and the river, which, as I recall, had some rather struggling woods and grasslands and widely spaced houses, mostly plain but a few fancy. A body in the river would have brought unwanted attention their way—I see it now—but a body laid out ritualistically in an iconic site—"

"Whoever 'they' are."

"And whatever they're up to as well, true. Whoever and whatever, they're worth investigating."

Just as I was nearing my fifth driveway along Route 71 I spied my husband's athletic form about a third of a mile ahead, striding easily along the shoulder in my direction in spite of the heat. I waved in an automatic gesture, but from that distance he wasn't able to make me out with his weakened vision. My being able to see him, however, meant that there were only three or four more residences between us to test out my hypothesis, and if we converged without a positive result, then the investigation truly would be at a dead end. Not knowing at all what we were looking for had so far proved to be remarkably unhelpful.

The waves of shimmering heat rising from the blacktop were a visible inducement to make haste, but I paused at the driveway entrance all the same, adjusting my sun visor and toying with the camera that hung by a cord around my neck. The camera, the binoculars I carried in hand, and my general appearance in khaki shorts, shirt, and hiking boots were meant to tell my tale for me: I was doing a survey of waterfowl along the river and needed access to the shore.

As for stories, the pair of rural mailboxes I suddenly noticed at the head of the drive told a different one. This packed gravel strip was more likely a shared lane leading back to two houses, both masked from view by woods and high shrubbery.

Twenty strides put me well into those woods, making me invisible from the road and bringing moderate relief in the form of shade from a small plot of tall aromatic pines planted years past for a reason unknowable. I halted briefly to wipe the perspiration from my face, using a handkerchief from my third encumbrance, an equipment bag slung from my shoulder,

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before passing on to where the lane branched right and left. The right branch, in truth, was a nearly straight continuation, running almost to the riverbank where it curved away toward a prosperous looking Cape Cod style house with a trim lawn and several shade trees. The left branch, in contrast, took a diagonal turn to a locked wooden gate about head high with metal signs attached reading NO TRESPASSING and BEWARE OF DOG. Chain-link fencing spread at angles from the gate, extending parallel to the right-hand lane all the way to the river about a hundred yards ahead, and as I stood there wondering a *frisson* came over me so powerfully that in spite of the oppressive heat I felt a momentary chill.

Ammonia. A small wafting breeze from off the river had carried away the scent of pine needles for an instant and brought me the briefest whiff of ammonia.

I turned to look back, thinking of R. J., but decided to scout onward in case my nose had deceived me. Following the right-hand lane seemed the logical tactic, and so I advanced looking about me as idly as I could manage but paying close attention to everything on my left, meaning virtually nothing but fence bordered by high plantings. I was halfway to the river when a dog—large and ferocious from the sound—began barking, followed by a woman's cry of "Get him!"—followed in turn by sounds of the swift approach of the dog in my direction. Then came the sight of a huge, vicious-looking animal with enormous jaws and teeth, hurtling itself against the fence and hurtling again directly at me ten yards beyond but nearly frozen in terror. Gooseflesh came out on my neck and arms as my left hand reached for the flap of the equipment bag, beneath which lay the illegally concealed target pistol I wished never to use on a living creature.

"Hey! No trespassing! *Can't you read?*"

The shout came before I saw more than a hand reaching through shrubbery to grasp the dog's collar, after which the animal ceased to bark and snarl. Then a face, the face of a woman whose comeliness had faded prematurely. She sent the dog away with a harsh command before pushing close to the chain-link where I could see her frame, tall and strapping like a teenage boy's with feminine contours. She wore shorts and a shirt, and I made her out to be thirty-five, although her features said otherwise.

"I—" My voice quavered with the uncertainty I felt. "The sign said no trespassing *over there*." I nodded in her direction. "I—I'm on the Illinois River waterfowl survey. I have to access the river to make a count."

She glared at me for a long moment before saying, "You just stay on that side, then, to do it. And don't go snooping over here." Before I could agree she had disappeared from view. I heard her receding voice as she hailed someone to chain the dog, and in that moment my impulse was to run back to find R. J. as quickly as I could. Logic sent me forward, nevertheless, on legs that trembled at first. I made for the shore and made a sweep of the broad river through R. J.'s field glasses, noting

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egrets in great number, cormorants, a few. A single great blue heron. Masses of gulls. Before turning back I took pains to write nonsense in a notebook from the pocket of my shorts, then followed along the fence on my return, and all at once caught a glimpse through a break in the foliage of an outbuilding like an overlarge flat-roofed garage, plus a man standing by one of its doors smoking a cigarette. And then, stronger than before, came the sharp, sweetish smell of ammonia. I kept on walking, though slowly, using the notebook as a prop, studying it.

"God bless you, young woman," said a soft voice from behind that nearly caused my heart to leap from my breast. The identification of myself as young as much as the unctuous tone of the address made me reluctant to halt, but halt I did, and upon turning saw a not quite elderly man with a serenely unlined face and plentiful white hair. He stood with the fingers of one hand locked in the chain-link just at the break in the foliage I'd noticed a moment earlier.

"Hello," I said.

"Come nearer, won't you please?"

I did as requested with a forced smile on my face, and when only a few feet separated us he spoke again, this time fervidly, watching me all the while. "Beauty. Beauty is so often evil, young woman—be warned. For one Susanna there are countless Jezebels and Delilahs. In the New Testament beauty is scarcely mentioned, but Herodias and Salome prove my rule."

When he then held up a pocket Testament I felt chilled even more, and my mind raced, wondering how to respond. "But Mary?" I said finally, forcing myself to return the old man's fierce gaze.

He faltered, perhaps not expecting a reply. "Mary? No, no mention is made, I think. With Mary her purity makes beauty, purity and wisdom. For virgins may be wise, but they may also be foolish! Consider the empty lamps." He examined me with a dubious regard. "Which of the virgins are you, I wonder? Wise? Or foolish?"

Again my mind raced. "I—my wish is to be a wise Virginia," I said at last, "since Virginia is my name. Are you wise?"

He waved the question aside and appeared to ponder. "Virginia, you say?" He looked up at the sky and then back. "Signs are difficult. Very difficult. Will you . . . take this book and read it?" He held out the Testament. "I have marked many passages, young woman, which must be read first! Promise to read them first!"

Just then a cry came of "Dad! You get back here!"

Without looking behind he raised the book high and dropped it over the fence. "Hurry. She's coming!" I snatched it up not knowing quite why and retreated to the gravel drive where I slipped it into the equipment bag.

"Dad! You old fool!" Again I saw the woman's hand first. It clutched her father's arm and drew him back.

"God bless you young woman," he cried out, "and read your Bible."

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The old man was replaced at the opening by the woman, who glared at me again.

"I'm going now," I said, putting a bold face on. "You're father's quite interesting."

"Him? He's gone cracked." She took me in more closely. "Through counting?"

"Yes, along here. I've got another two miles to cover." I gestured. "Goodbye."

R. J. and I were back at the car at the Council Overhang parking lot before I felt brave enough to examine the old man's Testament, in part because it reintroduced the very element of fanaticism to the case that we had decided earlier was a sham. Taken together with the ammonia odor I had smelled, nevertheless, it seemed to confirm the immediate locale of Jay Tommasin's demise.

The marked passages, when we finally looked at them, did far more.

Larry Duvall

When the call came I was leaving for home by way of a steak dinner at Tad's, but "It's R. J. Carr" forced a U-turn, and I'm still a steak dinner behind twelve years later. On a hunch I picked up in my office with the door closed and said, "It better be hot and juicy."

"Yeah, well, let's hope you can beat the *Trib* into print at least. It'll be public, I'd say, in a couple of hours."

I glanced at the clock: seven forty. "Start talking, then. I'll be recording." He talked for half an hour or more from a phone booth in Starved Rock Lodge, a couple of times handing the receiver over to Ginny, his wife, who not only looks better but sounds better over the phone. When we hung up I was feeling shaky but also manic. Out of what he'd told me I could see three stories, and we had exclusives on two for sure and maybe the third, depending on how quick the competition was on the uptake. I phoned a few people in the building first, since commandeering the front page wasn't part of my job description, and then I quietly invited two reporters in from the newsroom, with the result that at about ten o'clock we went to press for the early morning edition and ate Billy Goat cheeseburgers while monitoring four TV channels with our fingers crossed.

My only problem? Ginny Carr had to be kept out of the stories or yours truly would have been beaten to a pulp. Believe it.

That was '94, when we were all naïve and didn't know it, of course, but here in the new millennium the only surprise is how naïve we were, at least about the "passages" cited in the old man's scripture. They weren't actual passages or texts, you see, just a bunch of underlined letters. And what hallowed exhortation did they spell out?

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Here's an edited version of our conversation that night to fill in the rest:

"It's complicated and bizarre," R. J. began, "so—"

"Bizarre sells papers."

"—it might be best to tell you what happened to Tommasin and then how we tracked it. Ready?"

"The tape's running"

"Okay—Journalism 101. On the afternoon of May 3, 1994, Jay Tommasin took a cab from his condo in Lombard and arrived in downtown Naperville at around five, where he killed a couple of hours watching a film before he walked to a restaurant called the Haven Grill, which he was thinking of reviewing for the Angle Press papers."

"But first he stepped into a bar—"

"Right. He stepped into the Haven Grill bar, ordered a drink, looked around, and spotted a drug deal taking place. What he didn't spot was the fact that the dealer, who worked at the restaurant as a waiter, recognized him from old times as the crime beat reporter who'd dogged the drug trade back in the eighties. At an opportune moment, the waiter and maitre 'd forced Tommasin at gunpoint into a small banquet room where they bound and gagged him and took away his shoes as an additional precaution. Also his identification. This is all relevant later on."

"Great. The tape's still running."

"At around eleven thirty Tommasin was hustled out the back of the restaurant and into a car—"

"Without his shoes."

"Right again. The car followed a route he didn't recognize, but eventually they hit I-80 westbound, exited at Ottawa, crossed the river and went west on Route 71 a few miles, and pulled into a drive out in the country that led back to a ramshackle old house with a large outbuilding. His restaurant captors handed him over to three men and a woman, and two of the men tied him to a chair in the outbuilding and left him till morning.

"The next day he was treated decently—fed, allowed to wash, and allowed to sit and talk with another man who was also a kind of captive, an elderly religious fellow named Martin Knox, the father of the woman who seemed to be the brains of the group. I'll give you more on Knox later. He's the hero of the story in a way, and a lot of what I've been telling you comes from him."

"Fine. So back to Jay."

"Uh-huh. Jay wasn't in the best of shape to begin with, of course, and he'd gotten no sleep to speak of, and in spite of the fact that his new captors told him he wasn't in danger, he probably feared for his life. Knox described him as talkative and charming, but also overexcited and flushed in the face. At around nine o'clock that night, at any rate, he suddenly cried out, 'Help—I need a doctor,' and fell over dead from a heart attack."

"Not exactly what his captors expected. I'm beginning to see—"

"The tape's still running, remember? If they hadn't known what to do

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with him before, they really didn't know what to do now. Finally they devised a plan to get rid of his body in a way that would divert attention from themselves and muddy up the trail leading back to the Haven Grill. About a mile up the road was the parking lot nearest Council Overhang. In the dead of night they drove there, four strong with Martin Knox as the unwilling fifth to light the way, and carried Tommasin's body through the woods and up the bluff to the overhang, where they laid him out with candles lit all around and spring wildflowers strewn across his chest. They assumed he would be found and identified the next day, since the spot was a popular hiking destination. What they didn't realize somehow was that his original captors had hung on to his ID wallet as well as his shoes. To complicate things more, Martin Knox, the last to leave, balked at the "paganness" of the wildflowers and put his pocket New Testament in Jay's hands in their place. And that's what happened to Jay Tommasin."

"But there's more. I smell drugs."

"Smell's the right word. On Tuesday Ginny and I did the rounds from Jay's condo, where we inspected his shoes, to Council Overhang, where we decided the newspaper version stank, to the hospital in Ottawa, where the medical examiner told us a thing or two, including a strange fact that had been suppressed. Tommasin's face and nasal passages showed signs of slight burning and the burning came from exposure to ammonia. It seems anhydrous ammonia is as common as seed for planting out in corn country in the spring—it's used to nitrogenize the fields—so we didn't give the fact the same weight the local sheriff had. It didn't lead in the right direction."

"Wait a minute. I remember something about—"

"Uh-huh. What we didn't know was that the stuff is essential to the production of methamphetamine."

"Bingo! So how did you track it down?"

For the next ten minutes I heard all about Dumpster Diver Tommy and his Magic Ventilator Shoes, R. J. at the Haven Grill, and Ginny's reasoning about why Jay's body was hauled up to Council Overhang. By the woman herself I was told of the vicious guard dog, the more vicious female who owned it, the female's religious nut old dad, and the giveaway whiffs of ammonia, not to mention a message found in the New Testament that I don't recall from those long, sleep-inducing boyhood Saturday mornings at confirmation class.

Then the phone went back to R. J. and I got the nuts and bolts of the sheriff's six P.M. raid on the meth lab, R. J. along as observer—names, descriptions, the gist of a lengthy interview with Martin Knox, the crazy fact that not only Knox but his two young grandchildren were held virtual prisoner by the old man's daughter and son-in-law. A last fact: Jay's face had suffered the burns when he was left overnight in the outbuilding near a leaky anhydrous ammonia tank.

What else? At ten o'clock that evening—or so R. J. gathered—Dupage County law enforcement agents were going to execute search warrants

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at the Haven Grill.

So there were my three stories. What happened to Jay; how R. J. and his anonymous "operative" found it out—byline R. J. Carr; and how two drug busts resulted.

Did those stories turn out to be worth fifteen thousand dollars to the *Star-Bulletin?*

Search me.

But R. J.'s not the sort of guy who takes being diddled around with lying down, and I'd been authorized by the panicky board room crowd to negotiate him back into the fold at any cost—if he succeeded. A check for five thousand made out to Carr Investigations and Security was what he demanded first, plus one just like it for Martin Knox as a reward, and a final five thousand dollar check to Dumpster Diver Tommy, the finder of the shoes—the whole thing being otherwise known as the R. J. Carr sucker-of-the-year routine, you might say.

Yours truly, of course, would have heard plenty about it later on if he hadn't added a fourth article to that front page, just a squib, promoting the generosity of the editors in providing the two additional "rewards."

How does that poem go? "If you can keep your head when all about you . . . ?" You keep your head and you keep your job, even if it usually *is* Chief Babysitter to the *Star-Tribune* editorial board.

SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
xyzbcg**lifeandth**jkmopqrsuvw

From "A Matter of Life and Death" (1952)

—Georges Simenon

Don't worry I gave the chap a crack on the head with a bottle. Laid him out properly. God knows what he wanted to do to the kid.

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Flora Obscura

The 1950s struck America like the A-bomb, wiping out almost everything that had defined it throughout the first half of the twentieth century. TV invaded the parlor, superhighways swept away the country store and replaced it with burger chains, and corporate automatons filled the vacuum left by the industrial patrarchs of the early 1900s. James Dean invented the teenager. The fallout from this cultural Ground Zero destroyed dozens of promising writing careers. Fletcher Flora was a casualty.

World War II restrictions on paper consumption had ended the thirty-year reign of the pulps, that vast repository of fast-paced, bare-knuckled prose wrapped in gaudy covers that outraged decency groups and incidentally provided America's only native contribution to world literature. When they resurfaced under Eisenhower, they were half their original size and cost more than twice as much, and could not compete with the ubiquity of television and that other notorious corruptor of youth, the comic book. (For contemporary relevancy, insert "video game.")

Much has been written about Black Mask, Dime Detective, *and* The Shadow, *but little about the digest-size publications that sprang up like suckers on their mighty stumps and withered soon after. You rarely see* Manhunt, Menace, *or* The Saint Detective Magazine *represented in pulp fiction anthologies, yet the work of their most obscure talents equals and sometimes surpasses their famous predecessors'. Fletcher Flora held his own against the best. Sadly, he's as forgotten as the worst.*

According to Bill Pronzini, pulp historian and tough-guy writer well known to these pages, Flora was born in Kansas in 1914 and died there in 1969, shortly after completing his last novel. He graduated Kansas State College, served with the 32nd Infantry Division in World War II, married, had three children, and published approximately a hundred and fifty stories and sixteen novels. It seems inconceivable that so large a body of work is out of print.

That situation stands corrected.

"Insurance" employs a style and themes made popular by Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain, but they're abused often by hacks who lack the imagination to invent their own. It's a brutal, tightly crafted story without an extraneous word (today's best-selling writers, please take note), and with a disturbing twist; but these have never been in short supply in crime fiction. Its premise, which might have seemed far-fetched in 1955, appears psychic in the light of recent real-life events; but we've all been burned by the phrase "ripped from the headlines." Its success depends upon none of these things.

Simply (if maddeningly) put, Flora's secret is a combination of self-confidence,

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unself-consciousness, and a knack for bringing dead language to life that some have called the divine spark, others magic. It was a rare gift when paper was scarce, and even more precious now that so many trees have sacrificed themselves for so little substance.

I'm privileged to present Fletcher Flora for fresh consideration. This time, let's try not to let him slip away.

INSURANCE

FLETCHER FLORA

He rented this shack down the beach, and he lived there over a year. Very few people paid any attention to him. He told the man who rented him the shack that he was a writer looking for seclusion, and the word got around. He'd grown a beard for the part, and he'd even bought a second-hand typewriter to substantiate it.

The first six months were easy, because he didn't expect anything to happen then. Afterward, it kept getting harder. Tension mounted as the days passed, and he walked down the beach to the town to meet all ships from the States. When a year had elapsed, he began to think that Ella was never coming, and he lay on the beach during the days and in the shack at night, cursing himself for a fool for ever having believed that she would follow him according to their plan, and then she finally came. It was exactly one year, six weeks and three days from the time of his own arrival.

She came in from the ship and walked right past him on the pier. He could have reached out and touched her, and he wanted like hell to do it, but he didn't. Her eyes flicked over him and away without any signs of recognition, and he turned and followed her up across the beach to the hotel. She was wearing a white sharkskin dress that fit her like a glove, and the bright light of the sun made a pale fire of her hair. He'd never been so glad to see anyone in his life. It's hard to keep an image clear and focused in the mind, and even in so little time he'd forgotten how beautiful she was. His stomach was like a clenched fist all the way to the hotel.

In the lobby, she registered and went up in the elevator, and he crossed over into the bar and crawled onto a stool. He ordered a daiquiri and sat there sipping it, the taste and touch of the rum and citrus juices cold and tart on his tongue. During the past year, he hadn't thought much about the murder itself, only about whether Ella would ever come or not, but

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now, waiting for her in the final minutes of his waiting, it came back into his mind in detail.

They had this place outside the city that Ella had inherited. It was really a farm, but they didn't do any farming. Not Ella and him. They liked their green stuff to come faster and easier than you could get it out of the ground. They had a few grand, and they wondered how to make it grow, and finally they decided it would be a good thing to invest it in an insurance policy on a dead man. Double indemnity, of course. They paid for twenty-five and planned to collect fifty. On him. He was the dead man. The insurance outfit didn't know that, of course. They had him examined, and the doctor signed a paper that said he was alive. Only Ella and he knew that he wasn't. For practical purposes, that is.

He kept looking for a guy who would do. He wanted someone in a hurry, because there wasn't any sense in sinking too much in premiums. Finally, the guy just stumbled into the setup and practically asked to be used. He was in the city when this guy came, and when he got back that evening, a cold evening in January, Ella met him out by the barn where he'd put the car.

"He's here," she said. "A young guy on the tramp. He asked for food and he wants to sleep in the barn. About your height and weight and age. He's perfect."

"How about his teeth?"

"No work on them at all. Just like yours. I told him you were in town to the dentist, and he said he'd been lucky. Said he'd never been to a dentist in his life."

"Neither have I. You're smart, honey. Beautiful and smart. Where is this guy?"

"In the kitchen eating."

"Okay. I'll go look at him."

She moved in against him, and the breath of her whisper was hot on his face. "Tonight, Steve. Make it tonight."

They lost time, the way they always lost time when she came at him like that, but after a while he went up to the house and into the kitchen where the young drifter was sitting.

Like Ella said, he was perfect. Steve told him it was okay to sleep in the barn, and when he'd finished eating, he took him down there. Inside the barn, in the darkness, it was easy to slip a leather strap around the drifter's neck, but it was a lot harder to hang on when the guy understood what he'd walked into. He threshed like a maniac and tried to twist around to get at Steve with his hands, but he couldn't keep it up long with the strap cutting into his throat, and pretty soon he was dead.

Steve improvised some braces and managed to prop the body upright in the opening of the stall where Reuben was kept. Reuben was a horse, a vicious devil, a fine killer. Steve went into the adjoining stall and, reaching over the partition, rammed him brutally in the flank with the handle of a fork. The horse lashed out with his hind legs, and one hoof caught the

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body of the drifter in the chest. The body was hurtled all the way across the central aisle of the barn. It smashed against the planking on the other side and bounced half way back before it hit the ground. Steve left it lying there and returned to the house.

Ella was waiting in the kitchen. She had a bag already packed and sitting on the linoleum by the door. Her cheeks were hot, and her eyes were bright with excitement. She looked as if she were burning up inside with a high fever. It made her more beautiful than ever. God, she was beautiful.

"Okay," he said. "It's done."

"You'd better get away, Steve. You'd better start the fire and leave."

He took her by the shoulders and let his hands slip in upon her throat. "Don't forget to come, honey. And just don't forget to *come*."

"I'll come, Steve. You know I'll come. Just as soon as everything's settled."

"Sure, honey, I know. But it'll be a long time. A long, long time. Can't you tell a guy good-by?"

So they said good-by in a way he thought would last him through all the time of waiting, and then he took the bag she'd packed for him and went back down to the barn. He scattered some kerosene around, putting quite a bit on the drifter's body, and then lit a lantern. He smashed the lantern on the planking where the body had struck and let it fall. Flames leaped up like spits of hell. He went out to the back side of the barn and ran with long, regular strides down the cowpath to the pasture. Behind him, he could hear old Reuben raising hell, could hear the crashing of his hooves against the stall.

He ran through the pasture to the creek, and, walking then, he followed the creek a couple of miles to a three-lane highway. He caught a ride on a pickup truck into the city, and next day he caught a bus to another city, and not long after that he caught a boat to another country, and so here he was, one year, six weeks and three days later, sitting in a bar with a daiquiri in his hands and Ella upstairs and the long wait almost over.

In about half an hour, she came. He could see her enter the room behind him, growing larger in the mirror, and she crawled onto a stool with one empty between them. She ordered a daiquiri of her own, and he watched her from the corners of his eyes, all the details once more sharp and clear that had been blurred by waiting too long on a beach, the sleepy eyes and red, sulky mouth, the body that even touching hardly made credible, the long twin sheens of nylon crossed at the knees. He thought of the way they'd said good-by, and he began to think that it was time to say hello, and as he sat there thinking about it, his pulse accelerated, and his heart knocked painfully at his ribs.

After a while, a guy angling for a pickup, he turned on his stool and said, "May I buy you a drink?"

She glanced at him and smiled a little and shrugged her shoulders. "Why not?"

He shifted over onto the intervening empty and told the bartender

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two more daiquiris. Understanding that business was going forward, the bartender supplied them quickly and faded. He was a good bartender. A guy sensitive to a situation.

"It's been a long time," Steve said softly. "I thought you were never coming."

"I almost missed you on the pier, darling. The beard makes you look older."

"How did it go?"

"There was a hassle. An investigation. They thought it was funny, a guy walking in behind a vicious horse like that. They paid off, though. Double. Fifty grand."

"Where's the money?"

"Upstairs, darling. Hidden in my baggage in a way it could never be noticed. Up there waiting for us, like we've been waiting for each other. When the three of us get together, that's when we start living."

"That's now, baby. There's you and me and the money and nothing left between us."

She lifted the daiquiri to her lips and her eyes to the mirror, and it was then he got the feel of something wrong. An unease in her manner, an uncertainty in her voice. A last remnant of left-over fear.

"I'm worried," she said. "I'm worried to hell."

"What's the matter?"

She lowered her glass to the bar and sat looking down into it, twisting it slowly by the stem between the scarlet tips of her fingers. "A man. He came down on the boat with me. I'm positive he's an insurance dick."

"You mean he's following you?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think he's a dick?"

"I saw him once before. I'm sure he's the one. There was another dick out to the farm on the investigation. Later, in town, I happened to see him with this guy who came down on the boat. They were having some beers in a bar. I followed them when they left, and they went to the offices of the insurance company. I know damn well he's a dick, Steve. I'll swear he's the same guy."

"What's he look like?"

"Look in the mirror, you can see for yourself. He's at a table behind us. Tall. Black hair. Wearing a white suit."

Steve lifted his eyes and sorted the dick out. He was concentrating on his drink, something in a tall glass with a peel curled over the edge, but Steve had the strange feeling that he was a guy trying too hard not to look at someone he wanted like hell to look at. A handsome guy. A tall, smooth, easy-to-look-at guy. Inside, Steve felt shrunken and icy cold, deadly with the pointed, purposeful deadliness of someone who's waited too long.

"He shouldn't have followed you," he said. "He never should have come."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll have to kill him, of course. I'll kill him fast, and we'll move out of here."

"No!" Her whisper possessed a desperate urgency. "No, Steve!"

"Why not? We killed once. This time it'll be easier."

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"That's just the point. Each time it'll be easier. We can't go on killing forever."

"Who said forever? Just twice. After this one, nobody'll ever find us."

"Look, Steve. There's another way. A better way. Give me a chance to convince you."

"When?"

"Tonight. Just as soon as I can get to you after dark."

He thought about the two of them on the dark beach after so long a time, and again his pulse was an acute and throbbing pain. "Can you shake the dick?"

"Leave it to me."

"Okay. I've got a shack down the beach. There's an outcropping of rock, jutting into the sea. The shack's the first one beyond it."

"I'll be there, darling. Wait for me. Wait just a little bit longer."

"Okay. For you and the money. Don't forget to bring it with you."

"I'll bring it."

He slipped off the stool and smiled at her like a guy who'd invested a drink in a project he intended to finish later. Without looking at the black-haired man in the white suit, he went out of the bar and the hotel and back down the beach beyond the outcropping of rock to the shack. He lay on his back in the sand with one arm bent up over his eyes to reinforce the thin, inadequate defense of his lids against the glaring white light, and all the tension that had mounted within him during the past half year seemed to dissolve and disappear, leaving his body relaxed and his mind functioning with a kind of dispassionate clarity. He lay without moving for a long time, until at last he became aware of a sudden chill in the air, and he opened his eyes to see the sun plunging into the sea. Almost before he could get up and go into the shack, the black, obliterating night had fallen with incredible suddenness and silence.

Inside the shack, he lit an oil lamp, turning the wick low. From his bag under the cot he slept on, he got a .38 revolver. He slipped the revolver under his belt, beneath the loose tail of his shirt, and sat down on the cot to wait some more. From his position, he could look through the open door of the shack and down across the beach at an angle to the mass of rock lapped by the sea. Once, after about half an hour, he got up and found a bottle and took a long pull from the neck. Then he resumed his seat on the cot and didn't move again until, such a long time later that he'd become unable even to estimate the time, he saw Ella coming up across the sand from the rocks in the first light of the moon.

He stood up to meet her, and regret twisted within him like a sharp knife that there would be no time to say hello as they had said good-by. She came in through the door and into his arms, and the weight of her body against his pressed the .38 into his flesh until it felt like a belly cramp.

She felt the steel in her own flesh and arched back in his arms. "A gun, Steve? Why?"

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He released her with one arm and took the gun out of his belt. He lifted it. "For you, honey. For you and your black-haired lover."

The hot blood drained out of her face, and the smoke cleared from her eyes on a bitter wind of fear. She put a palm flat against his chest and tried to push away, but he held her trapped tightly against him with one arm.

"What's the matter with you, Steve? You gone crazy?"

He laughed softly. "Maybe a guy who waits too long develops a lot of peculiar twists you could call crazy. One thing, he gets sensitive. He develops what the skull-shrinkers call ideas of reference. Everything seems to point at him. Everything has significance. Most of all, he doesn't believe in coincidence."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Steve. I swear to God."

"Don't you, honey? I'm talking about your phony insurance dick. I'm talking about your just happening to see him in town. About your just happening to tail him right to the insurance company's offices. About how he just happens to be a tall, sleek guy. Just the kind of guy you'd like to buy with a hunk of fifty grand. But more than anything else, I'm talking about how you don't want me to kill him. Don't you remember me, honey? I'm the guy who killed for you once before. I'm the guy who remembers how you could hardly wait until I got the job done. Since when have you become so sensitive?"

"You *are* crazy, Steve!" She leaned against him again, letting her lips brush his in the formation of her words. "I'm here, aren't I? Why would I have come, if I'd wanted to double-cross you? All I had wanted to do was stay away."

He laughed again, feeling the soft, wet stirring of her lips, the stronger stirring inside of an almost sickening desire to believe her. "Why? I'll tell you why, honey. Because you're a gal who wouldn't want to spend the rest of her life expecting someone she didn't want to see. Because you knew damn well I'd come back eventually and find you. The only way to prevent that was to come down here to kill me. You and lover-boy."

A violent tremor shook her flesh, and she beat his chest softly with a clenched fist. "No, Steve. It isn't that way. For God's sake, you've got to believe me! Would I have brought the money? Would I have brought it just the way you told me to?"

"Where is it? I told you to bring it here."

"It's in a belt around my waist, Steve. Fifty thousand-dollar bills, minus two for expenses. Let me go, I'll show you."

He released her and stepped back. "All right. Show me."

She lifted her skirt and removed the belt. It was thin, flat, made of waterproof silk. She handed it to him, and he unzipped it and counted the forty-eight crisp pieces of paper. He stuffed the belt and the paper into the front of his shirt, tucking the loose tail into his trousers. Color had returned to her face in bright spots high on the cheek bones. Her breasts rose high and fell and rose again. Her tongue slipped out to dampen her dry lips.

"Now do you believe me? Now can you show a gal how you missed her?"

She came to him, but he held her off by the shoulders, shaking his head.

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"A guy who's waited as long as I have can wait a little longer. This time we'll do it together, honey. Down by the rocks."

She shrugged angrily, the color burning hotter on her cheeks, and turned away and out the door into the sand. He followed, the gun held loosely at his side. Steps apart, they crossed the beach in thin moonlight and vanished into the cast shadow of the outcropping. Waiting there in darkness that had acquired a penetrating chill, the ancient rock towering above him, he could dimly see her, could smell her, could hear the heavy whisper of her breath pass in and out between her lips, and he prayed to whatever dark gods listen to prayers of ones like him that the black-haired man in the white suit would not come.

But he did. And soon. He came swiftly and silently down the beach, and his gun was already in his hand. When he came abreast, about five yards inland, Steve lifted his .38 and fired. The sound crashed against the rock and was thrown out across the sand at the man who had stopped suddenly, erect, to twist slowly in the direction of his death. The .38 crashed and jumped a second time, and the man stepped back, swayed, and sank to his hands and knees. He remained in that position for a moment, head hanging, and then very slowly, with tremendous effort, he lifted his head until his face was faintly visible in the moonlight, and his voice, distorted by anguish, carried clearly across the sand to the rocks.

"Ella," he said. "Help me, Ella, for Christ's sake . . ."

His elbows collapsed, and he lay down soundlessly in the sand, and it was at that moment, exposed by his words, that Ella took a deadly toy from between her breasts and shot Steve in the belly. She shot him three times and ran. He stood frozen in a kind of terrible shock, the .38 fallen to the sand and his arms outspread and his fingers clawing for support at the rock behind him. Watching her run and fall sprawling and rise to run again, he slipped down against the rock, dimly aware of jagged edges tearing at his flesh. He sat for a few seconds in the sand, his chin resting on his chest, then he fell over sideways and lay still.

He lay there and felt the red life run out of him in three thin streams, but he would not die. He was conscious all the time of the silk belt and the crisp paper inside his shirt. With a final deadly tenacity given to him by the certainty of death, he thought only of the money that would bring her back, and he would not die.

He closed his eyes to rest their heavy lids and almost never opened them again, almost missed her coming after all.

But then, prompted by a whisper of sand or a scent or a touch, he forced them open to see her bending over between him and the moon. She moved in a thick swimming mist of darkening red, and he reached up swiftly into the mist with a desperate expenditure of his remaining strength to jerk her down upon his body.

He was never aware of her scream or her frantic threshing and was even denied the last slight satisfaction of feeling the frail bones of her throat break beneath his thumbs.

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THE STORY THAT WON

The October Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Kevin McElhinney of Brattleboro, Vermont. Honorable mentions go to William Moal of Modesto, California; Ann Marie Potter of Las Vegas, Nevada; Randy Pigman of Brownsburg, Indiana; Christine Watkins of San Marcos, California; Kent Brown of De Pere, Wisconsin; Gilbert Ortega of Tucson, Arizona; Helen C. Bechan of Oakham, Massachusetts; Dennis W. Allen of Garland, Texas; Sharon Smith of Fairview, North Carolina; and Michael Penncavage of Oak Ridge, New Jersey.

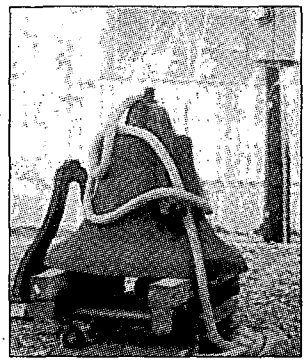

Photo by Myrna J. Yancey

READY TO ANSWER THE BELL

KEVIN MCELHINNEY

Exhausted after a long night, the members of Delta Omega Alpha admired their prize, now resting in the fraternity house's backyard.

"This is our best prank ever!" exclaimed Larry Dodge, mastermind of the theft. "Even if State beats us this afternoon, they can't ring that stupid bell like they always do.".

State's football team had won the last ten editions of the big game, and the bell ringing grated on their crosstown rivals.

A pledge recruited for the theft asked, "Larry, what'll we do with the bell now?"

"Don't worry, kid," a nonchalant Larry said, opening a beer. "After the game, we'll drive it back to State. Painted in our school colors, of course."

As the laughter died down, four uniformed officers and an older man in plain clothes walked into the yard. "Forget about the paint job, boys," the plainclothesman said. "You're going downtown."

"How did you know it was us?" asked Larry Dodge. "We just got back, and I'm sure nobody saw us."

"I thought something might happen to the bell this year," the detective said, "so I put a GPS tracker in it. You might as well have rung the bell all the way here."

As the frat members were led into police cruisers, the detective turned to one of the officers, saying, "Let's hurry up this booking. I want to be with my old teammates from State when they call us out to the field to mark the tenth anniversary of our winning the big game."

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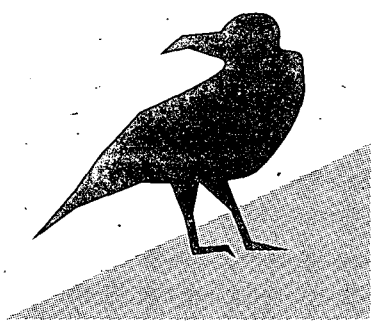

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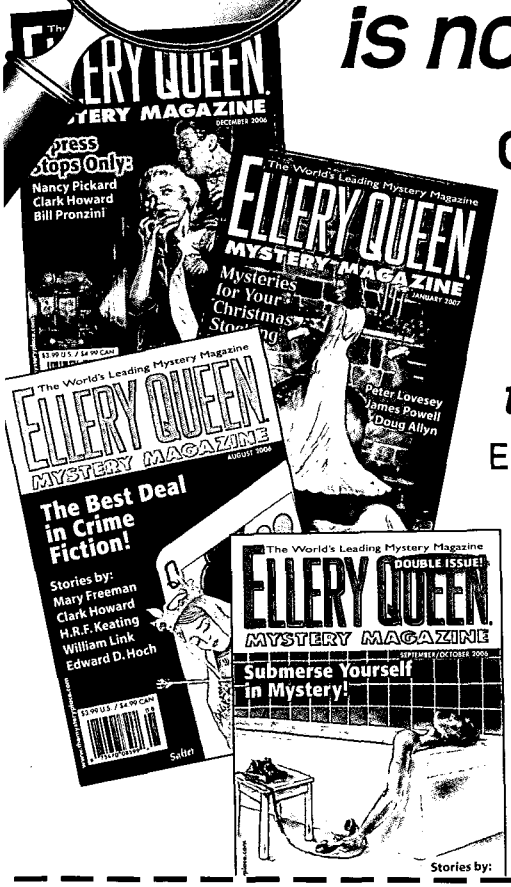

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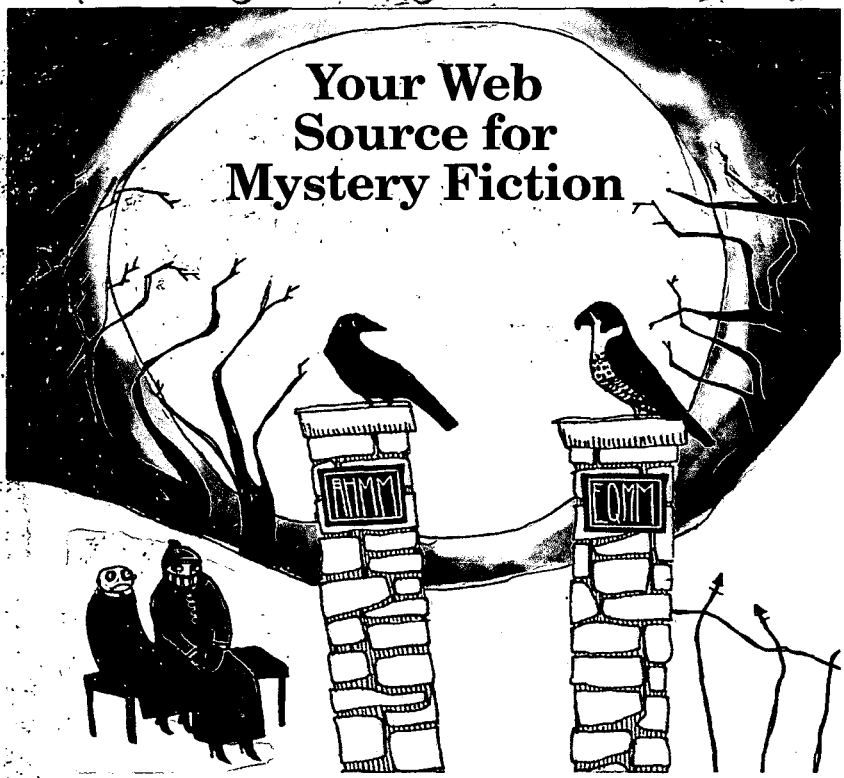

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